

世界最強の

後衛

～迷宮国の新人探索者～

著／とーわ (Tôwa)

イラスト 風花風花 (Huka Kazabana)



World Strongest Rearguard – Labyrinth Country and Dungeon Seekers

–Sekai Saikyou No Kouei Meikyuukoku No Shinjin Tansakusha–

- Volume 1 -

**-Author-
Toowa**

**-Illustrator-
Kazabana Fuuka**

[pinky once-sama (Yado Inn)]

- STORY -

A heavily overworked businessman takes a nap on a bus headed to a corporate retreat. He awakens in a fantastic labyrinth city, immediately being informed that he has been reincarnated after dying in a bus accident and must work as a dungeon seeker.

Confused, the former businessman heads to the registration point to get his job, only to be hit with two huge and horrible surprises: The first is that his pushy boss lady who had worked him to the point of collapse in his former life has also reincarnated here. The second his job received from registration is unknown and unreadable –no one will party with him and will treat him like an invalid if they find out this secret!

He is forced to hire a sub-human mercenary to party with him, and things will only get worse from there as he is forced to confront the deadly nature of his new, reincarnated, occupation.

『後衛』という文字が輝き、
ライセンスの職業欄に
しっかりと表示された。



「えっ……？」

ルイーザさんは
何とも言えない
表情をしている。

「迷宮国の新人探索者」

世界最強の
後衛



『乾杯!』

みんな食べるのはそこそこのにして、
次々に俺に酒を注ぎに来る。
注がれ、飲み、を繰り返しているうちに、
頭がぼーっとしてきた。

ミサキ

エリーティア

スズナ

テレジア

アリヒト

キョウカ

ルイーザ



「えっ………?」

手の震えが止まり、鍵が少女の胸の穴にすっと入り込む。
そして奥まで差し込んだところでカチリ、
という手応えがあり——その身体が、わずかに震えた。



世界最強の後衛

～迷宮国の新人探索者～

とーわ (Tôwa)

イラスト／風花風花
(Huuka Kazabana)



Prologue

The Reincarnation Line

Before even knowing what happened, I was queued up in a long dark tunnel together with the young and old.

I was pretty sure that I was on a bus for a skiing trip together with the other company employees. I closed my eyes and dozed off until morning came. But what's this being in another place? I don't even remember getting off the bus. This doesn't augur well.

Abreast the line, I heard something. "Are you serious?"
"We actually managed to make it back alive."

Meanwhile, there was this woman managing the line while it was moving forward. It seemed like this was a familiar routine and the line was gradually advancing.

("Did we encounter a bus accident?" Might it be that all of us here actually died?")

I wonder if this queue actually leads to heaven. If so, then there might actually be life after death.

That being the case however, I have died and left a lot of things I still would have wanted to do.

It's difficult to imagine though if this tunnel would lead us to hell. It might still be too early to think. Maybe this is just a dream as I am yet to find my co-workers within the line.

Sooner or later I will also get married, if I manage to survive, that will break this death flag. How wonderful would that be, but if the accident happens to be on a snowy mountain, the odds of being rescued might be slim.

Within the queue, I saw some colleagues who were on the trip. But as I try to move away from the line to ascertain things, my legs fail me so all I can do is press forward.

Far along the line opposite mine, I can see my female manager clearly. To describe her,

she was the taskmistress, a slave driver, works you to the point that you would leave as soon as the last train arrives. Now being unable to resist; she was properly lined up, but I could still sense her pride and intimidating air.

While assessing the situation, the high school girl who was in front of me took something from the person whom I believe to be a guide and walked ahead following the direction from where the line has appeared.

I saw her when I got on the bus. She was a young woman with black hair and straight cut bangs. She appeared to be a bit gloomy but was the epitome of pure feminine beauty. [大和撫子] She was also together with her friends that somehow set a gyaru-like mood.

Thereafter, a woman who seems to be dressed in a way that you can only see in fantasy games appeared. She had shoulder length purple hair, wore short sleeves and casual culottes. This fashion cannot be seen anywhere in Japan. She also wore a beret but on closer look, there were glyphs present on it that would likely tell that she was a mage.

Feeling teary but at the same time ecstatic, she stood along in line and handed something to everyone then sent them forward.

“Yes, next person please. Kindly take this with you. Once you enter, please visit the guild first to decide your occupations. There should be nothing else you can do without doing that.”

“What guild? Please wait, what will become of us from now on?”

“This is the “Labyrinth Country”. You have been reincarnated and brought to this country. Sadly, it would already be impossible to choose another destination, I am sorry.”

There are things I still would have wanted to ask but it seems that i could not inquire any further.

“Since I am also living in that town, I would guide those reincarnators whenever I have time. If God permits, we will see each other again.”

I’m just wondering if she was God or an angel. She seems to be someone special but I’ll have to put on hold for now.

I managed to get a sturdy leather tag similar to the size of a bill then I headed through the light up ahead.

Chapter 1

The Labyrinth Country

“Labyrinth country” is a place where only those who explore labyrinths and those who support them thrive on.

Everything here is all about these labyrinths. There are multiple points of entry here. This in turn makes it hard for demons to enter and it divides the country into various labyrinth ranks.

The total number who got together with me in this incident was about thirty. With an accident of these number of casualties, it would surely have made the headlines. However, for the longest time, I have always been alone so there wouldn't be that much lamenting for the family I may have left behind. In a way, this has been some kind of deliverance for me.

My colleagues might be mourning right now, but I'm sorry that it can't be helped. I'd rather have to think on how to make both ends meet in this world from today onwards.

Previously instructed, we made our way from the tunnel out to various places on the Labyrinth Country and as we approached the guild, we obtained various pieces of information.

Without any hesitation, I made my way through the square. The guild building and its surroundings conspicuously stand out. When I entered, some have already finished their registrations as “Seekers”, more or less ready for an adventure.

“Hey are you a newcomer? If you are, I'd rather suggest that you don't visit anywhere other than the Beginner Star Labyrinth. Entering two labyrinths may lead you to death instantly.”

“Well, it's fatal and you would not have even proven your worth.”

Men, who were in their thirties, were called Guild Seniors, and since they seem to give solid advice based from their exploits, it assured the newcomers that it will not be that

tough.

“You would not want to die from goblin arrows, do you? They are aggressive and will shoot without an ounce of hesitation. One hit you take from an arrow laced with bacteria bred from manure will be fatal. For beginners like you, I will not even try to extract that poison.

“One-hit... So beginner-level labyrinths...”

“It will be okay, I will not mind letting you keep your earnings on your first day. Don’t worry, I will let you split the amount amongst yourselves.

“Oh, thank you!”

I don’t know how this transaction works or whether it is in good faith but do some seekers make their living by just guiding newcomers? As the thought suddenly sprang to my mind, I prayed for my survival.

Should we group together as former colleagues if we have to explore the labyrinth? Most of them might think that it would be better to organize or be invited by a party with experienced seekers.

Among those who were not invited yet to a party was the black-haired girl. Her gyaru friends are not with her unfortunately, instead they were invited to a party being led by a young male adventurer.

I wonder how things will turn out after leaving their friend, though the black haired girl doesn’t really look that discomposed. For some reason, perhaps even from the very beginning, she may have already anticipated this from the gyaru girls.

I would have that peace of mind with a friend or colleague early in a party then invite those who came from the same world. I thought of inviting the black haired girl too, but it was not even brought to light.

“Suzuna Shiromiya, thank you for your application, the job you signed up for is...”Priestess”. Congratulations, we have evaluated you for your proficiency and it was well taken.”

“Oh, thank you.....”

“Please take the cards that were given to you for guild registration and write your desired job. If you have the necessary qualifications for the job you wrote, it shall be approved.”

A lady swordsman, who was of similar age, approached the new priestess. She wore a blue armor with a silver breastplate and carried a sheathed sword held by a leather belt. Her platinum hair was bundled on her back and her long slit pupils surely attract people even from a distance. Adventurers, who came and went, ceased their chatting and gazed eagerly upon her every move.

“That would be... enough I guess?”

“Ah, Y... Yes, How may I help you... I just arrived in this town so...”

Suzuna answered with a strained voice.

“I know, you’re registering here. You’re a newbie from those who reincarnated.”

A blonde lady swordsman spoke in a small voice just enough to be heard in a quiet space.

“I am looking for a rearguard... as a vanguard there are some disadvantages. I think it will be difficult for beginners... but if you are in my party, our levels should raise up soon enough...”

She gave an impression of a veteran and was attempting to persuade Suzuna; desperately trying to convince her due to the lack of partners available.

“Elicia is now looking for party members...”

“Just how many days will it be again?”

“She is strong and regardless of who she is, they can organize a party with her. If she is willing enough, they would not even ask for it.”

Elicia seems to be famous at the guild. A strong lady swordsman would really draw attention even though there was no reason for trying to do so.

As what I anticipated from Suzuna, she noticed something malicious. Regardless, she offered assistance to Elicia who looked down – resigned. She in turn grasped Suzuna's with both hands.

"Thank you very much. I am still inexperienced but I will try my best as your rearguard."

"Well, really, is it okay?"

"I was actually trying to carry it out with my friend, but unfortunately, she enlisted with another seeker... so it would be very assuring. Even if I'm uncomfortable, I likely would still have decided to join your party."

Thank you. My name is Elicia Centrail. And you are?"

"I am Shiromiya..... No, it's Suzuna Shiromiya."

With both of them reaching a mutual understanding, they left the guild. There were still people looking at them from behind as they set off, but what is it with Elicia's 'bad' rumors?

I'm a bit curious but first I'll need to decide on a job. Upon turning to the counter, I found another, maybe another reincarnator who was looking troubled.

"My apologies, you are not qualified to become a "Holy Knight", but you can still select from a "Warrior" , "Thief", or "Fighter"."

"I want a "Hero Class" job! Be silent and just change my job!" Said the burly man while he was squabbling at the receptionist's window. His continued intimidation on the receptionist alerted the guards and arrest him.

"Hey, what are you doing?! Let me go! You can't do this to me."

"Apologies, but Labyrinth Country rewards misbehavior with disciplinary action. Your "Karma" has also shifted higher. You will have to be imprisoned until it returns to zero."

"St... quit it... let me go... , I'll apologize, I apologize so please... Uooh!"

I really cannot say if he was a reincarnated person too, but because of what I have just

witnessed, it would be better not to cause anything rowdy in the guild. I do not also want to cause something irreversible and reset my “karma” to zero before I get out of prison.

I urgently need to decide which job I would likely get so I can at least be at ease. From conquering labyrinths or acquiring provisions, there is an order for things for one to have a resolute lifestyle.

Chapter 2

Job Selection

“Dear customer, have you registered your guild card? If you don’t finish registering as a seeker, you won’t be allowed to enter the labyrinth.

“Oh, ah... My apologies. That commotion caught my attention.”

The receptionist who approved Suzuna’s job as “Priestess” calls out to me.

Her big breasts were way across the board. Is being a glamour model now the job of a guild receptionist? She had aquamarine hair and wore a monocle with a mole under her eye. She was blooming and crammed with a lot of sensuality.

“Dear customer, fashion may differ from our worlds and mine may appear to be very revealing. One thing to watch out for is your conduct. It has a direct relationship on how your Karma rises. Please maintain a proper line of sight.”

“My apologies.”

“Fufu, dear customer, being risqué is part of my job. I apologize for teasing you. You won’t be reprimanded, so please be at ease and relax those shoulders”

In an elegant manner, she covered her mouth with her hand to let out a giggle. I liked that cute gesture. I think that any hairstyle got their own charms, but the hairstyle she wore was comparatively meek. She was also one of those straightforward types rather than those to be conscious of.

“Pardon me, I am Louisa Fermel, serving as a registration officer for beginner seekers. Here will also serve as a consultation window for a variety of inquiries. You can choose another person, but tell me if you wish to proceed with the registration.”

“Y... Yes... Why is it that I feel tense all of a sudden?”

Prior to being reincarnated, we often worked in collaboration with other companies

and as long as they were friendly, the communication would go smoothly.

“Ouch!”

“Sir, is something the matter? It might be an after effect of being reborn and there is confusion in your memories. I’m sorry, I may have spoken a lot. Should I call for a healer?”

“Oh no, it’s okay. It’s just a slight headache.”

It felt somewhat unpleasant reminiscing.

I was close to 30 years old, severely overworked by my younger lady manager. She had around twenty other subordinates but it felt like I was just the one doing all the work.

The amount of work I had on my desk almost didn’t permit me to take breaks. She even asked me to be her secretary whenever we have a meeting in-house or outside the company. She was an elite, and although work can be tremendous in your prime, it would be impossible for me to ask for the same treatment as her.

I once joked for a reassignment into a different department. She turned in for the worse and had me to do overtime during coffee break and even after regular time for work has ended.

But here, in a different world, you will no longer be a slave for a boss nor a dog of a company. When I thought about it, it felt like my mind and body got a breath of fresh air.

“Good, it seems to have passed.”

“Thank you for your help. So how do I register?”

“Please have a seat first. It seems that you have not yet filled out the job on the space provided on your “Seekers Card”. Please write down the job that you think you have an aptitude for, or just tell me the job that you would like to take.”

“I see, but I do not wish to choose for a specific job.”

“Those whom have been reincarnated came from diverse backgrounds. Some of them

registered jobs that we couldn't even comprehend. They asked to keep that information confidential so I cannot disclose it to you."

In other words, Suzuna could not divulge that she became a "Priestess" so I guess the only ones who know her job is me and Elicia.

By the time registration has started, the competition to get party members from the surroundings started. Now I understand.

Why do we have to explore the labyrinth? I get an explanation before I have to set off. In this world, everything is all about the seekers and the people around it. By playing the role of a seeker, it is possible to obtain an appropriate remuneration.

It does not matter if you get off a good or bad start here even if your job is in demand. However, I do not possess a special career and before reincarnating, I only worked as a planner from an advertising agency. I can only prepare project proposals and presentation materials with a little knowhow on DTP (Desktop Publishing). The rest is my English conversation skills that gave me a bit of an edge at the time when I joined the company.

Louisa's not rushing me. She started dealing with another reincarnator at the other counter. Maybe she wanted to give me more time since this decision is a life changing matter.

I get the feeling that I need to choose my preferred job as soon as possible and join in the exploration. The others might already be advancing to the next level while I am still deciding on this.

"Hey, Atobe is that you?"

"Section Chief Igarashi?."

"What's with that face?" I found someone familiar so I called on you."

In retrospect, she was serious-looking woman with a loosely wrapped brown hair. Igarashi Kagami, an elite within the elite who climbed to the position of section chief in three years of joining in our company on pure meritocracy.

She wore a tight skirt and warm-knitted vertical rib sweater. She was also wearing

thick tights due to the cold weather but nothing has changed from what I have last seen her in the company. Although her body proportions are still the usual, if you admire them, you will either be killed or abused to the point that you would not want to continue living. Anyway, my demon boss still looked like the way she used to be.

I felt miserable in cold sweat and even though I haven't told anything yet, it felt like I had already made a mistake.

"Have you decided on a job already? If possible, please choose a job that would be useful to me."

"Huh... section-chief, you'll be my partner in a party?"

"That's not the case. When you're ready, come to me. If there is a benefit to form a party by that time, I'll organize it."

("Damn it... looking down on people so easily.")

For her to be calling me just to say something as that? I may be adept now but I may be useful sooner or later.

"Seriously, how did this happen? We're all dead?"

"Uhm... The bus got into an accident and all those who were dead got reincarnated."

"Well, it's not like my department will get dissolved. I hope the remaining guys can get along with the rest. Not that I care anyway. If the bus driver is here, I'd like to have a word?"

"I'm sorry to trouble you. All the best of luck, section chief."

I wanted to return quickly, but she returned with a tight glare. To be honest, I do not enjoy being with this cold woman.

"You should worry about yourself. The labyrinth is a world of monsters right? I wanted you to be vanguard and be my meat shield but I'll give you a break.

"Meatshield..."

Our company also dealt with the advertising of games. Even if it seems that Igarashi-san is not interested in such a thing, the information contained on the business materials enter her head. There were even instances that she was more knowledgeable than me playing games.

That being said, she should be able to adapt in this world without resistance.

“Bye, let’s meet again somewhere. Don’t overdo it and stay alive.”

Yes. I’ll try somehow... By the way...”

“I’m no longer the section chief when I came to this world. If Atobe will call me by my name... That’s would be a little surprising, Well, anything goes. What?”

“Uhm, well, can you tell me your job?”

Given her personality, I doubt that she will disclose it, instead, she will ask, “What do you intend to do with it?” Then she will start to get grumpy.

“Do you want me to refer you a job that would be useful to me? That won’t be a bad idea.”

“Well, um... Well, that’s right.”

“Well then?”

“Y, yes. I want to choose the right job that would be acknowledged by the section chief.”

It maybe awkward to get an advice from her, but I did it anyway. She may be a demon boss, but she’s quite an open book and she gives in way too easily.

“I wish you did that back in the office. I suffered insomnia when I joined the company.”

“Eh... But Igarashi-san was always on time... right?”

“Ah... that... Never mind. “Valkyrie” that’s my job. I can use sword and spear, even I can utilize spirit magic up to an extent.”

“Seriously? I think that’s an awesome job.”

“Of course, it’s only natural for me. I’ll open my party now for you to join. Normally, I’d prefer a ladies party only but we don’t have that much available here.”

“Thank you for letting me know. I’ll see you again, section-chief.”

I was caught up in our conversation... As I made an attempt to walk away from her, I prayed for her safety. Then I heard in a small voice.

“.....You forgot to call my name, I’m so irritated.”



I guess I did, but I never looked back. It's not the first name so it should be good.

And all the while whilst thinking that she may have become a bit softer since we have been reincarnated.

I only have a few acquaintances. I want them to survive, and I want to build a friendly relationship to the utmost possible.

—Would that be difficult?

Chapter 3

Rearguard Skills

“Was that your boss from the previous world? She looks exceptionally tough.”

The brightly smiling Louisa continued as she attended to me. It was their warm gesture to seekers who visited the guild. In a way, it was very soothing.

“Now that I’ve come to this labyrinth country, I can gain new achievements as a seeker. And for that reason, I want to choose a job that I won’t be regretting later.”

Did the section-chief for once even appreciated me whenever I gained some achievements?

No, that’s not it, I should aim for the top, as high as it could get me. In my previous life, I could not make it to the top, even if I have to work extensively, There was no way. This time, it would be different here in this world.

“Louisa, the seekers achievements, for example, how do you rate them?”

“Uhm, first of all, the seeker must raise his rank, for new seekers however, their rank will still be undetermined. Depending on their achievements, the rank written on their seeker’s license will vary.”

Louisa taps my seeker’s license. I traced the character written on the upper left, then the contents displayed on the card changed.

(Is it possible to use this like a compact Tablet-PC? It’s intuitive and very straightforward.)

“This is the part of the page that records and displays your logs in the dungeon. Nothing has been written yet; the log is evaluated and the ranking is calculated after you exit the maze. Please take care not to go out immediately in the labyrinth or escape a demon while being attacked one-sidedly. If you’re at the bottom of the rankings, you’ll sleep in a dungeon, far from the comfort of the stables.”

“.....I’d like to have the stable at least.”

“In the stable, only a small amount of health and magic power recovers.

Please ask me for help at any time. Although I can’t do it time and again , I’m pretty sure that I can arrange a lodging.”

It would be very convenient if Louisa could let me stay at a house this time, but I think it would be unethical of me ask.

“.....Oh, are you staying here tonight? Let’s see, it’s hard to make a quick arrangement, If you’d like I can take emergency measures to my house...”

“No, no, it’s not like I’m still in the dungeon and that I just missed an arrangement. So it’s okay.”

I should have taken up on her kind offer, but I hurriedly rejected it. I will be indebted to Louisa. I need to show some results and avoid the repercussions of becoming the lowest rank. Now, I have my doubts about my future.

“Louisa, can I ask you one final question? The demand for newcomers are high. Elicia mentioned this, too, but what is a Rearguard?”

“Ah, the demand for a rearguard is high. Sadly, their physical strength and defense powers are low. The survival rate of rearguards within the span of five years is also very low. In addition to that, Elicia has a bit of a situation finding one. It’s not really good for a party to consist of jobs that focus on strength alone. To conquer labyrinths of the highest ranks, they become mandatory to a party. Seekers cannot be composed of vanguards only. She will be stalled for a while trying to raise her rearguard.”

“.....I see.”

It’s not that I don’t want to avoid it because I’ve been told about being a meat shield. If there is a demand, I will not hesitate to grab it.

If I put “rearguard” here, I wonder what the heck I’ll be heading to. I can’t be a monk because I was not even that religious. I’m barely thirty years old , too early for a magician. My choices are running out.

For the time being, anything is fine so I'd like to become a "Rearguard". If I write "Rearguard" on the job column, will it choose a suitable rearguard profession for me?

"It seems that you have made your decision? Well then, please trace the license with your finger."

I finally made up my mind and wrote "Rearguard" in the job column.

Almost instantaneously, the characters "Rearguard" appeared and was replaced by a set of unreadable characters which it permanently displayed on the job column of license.

"Eh...?"

I was relieved, but Louisa shows an indescribable expression. It sounded like she uttered something in confusion. –But it was probably just my imagination.

"N, No way... Even for a magician, monk or archer, the letters that you write should remain intact. But what's with this..."

Louisa asked for my license, brings out the monocles from her pocket and checked the letters as if she was trying to appraise it.

She leaned slightly on the counter and asked me to listen so that nobody else around could try to eavesdrop.

"I have never seen such a character... Erm, your name is... Arihito Atobe, what on earth did you write on your license?"

"Erm, I just said that a while ago, I wrote "Rearguard."

I calmed myself while answering since I got a bit excited while she was whispering near to my ears. Louisa slowly retracted and alternately stares at the license and my face. She smiled pleasantly as if she has come to understand the underlying situation.

"Congratulations, Atobe, your wishes have been accepted." Please wait a minute."

"What job did I end up with?"

Louisa returned from leaning on the counter so that it wouldn't start a commotion. For the second time, like being drawn by gravity, I caught a glimpse of her breasts rested on the counter table. I can't remain fixated on them or else, my karma will rise.

"So... it's rearguard. If you told others of such a job, no one will believe you, you will be an object of mockery. However, I think that it is also my responsibility to give you an advice and grant you special permissions. Please take this "mercenary ticket" until you understand the strengths of your job."

Louisa took something that looks similar to a bag and puts her hand into the sleeve. She took out several pieces of paper similar to bank notes and discreetly handed it to me like it was some kind of bribe money.

"If you use that ticket, you can recruit a mercenary before you dive into the labyrinth. Only a mercenary. You cannot recruit a person using that ticket."

"With the exception of humans? No way... Are they monsters?"

"No, there are trained monsters but they can only be accompanied by a trainer in the party. It's a demi-human that you can recruit temporarily. I think the most reliable one to consider is a Lizardfolk. Their basic abilities are perfect for a vanguard and most of them have some kind of warrior-based jobs."

Well – choosing the job called "rearguard" may not have been so bad after all.

If I recruit a lizardfolk using a copper mercenary ticket, I can explore the beginner's labyrinth, albeit a one-time employment. If I take into consideration the advantages of this opportunity, I will be able to discover and identify the pros and cons of being a rearguard.

"I just got my job, but do I have any skills?"

"Yes, you can get two skills by default." Flick through the license page repeatedly and you will see the skill. You can choose from what is displayed over there. For this, I will not advise anything. Skills are the lifeblood of the seekers and basically, you should not disclose what skills you have acquired."

"I see... It should be disclosed only trustworthy friends."

“Yes, the person should have your back. If you think you can trust him, you can confide with him. Party is teamwork. If you don’t work together, you won’t be strong.”

Louisa closes her eyes and puts her hands together close to her chest.

“.....As an act of courtesy and as being your officer in charge, I pray for your safety. May the hidden god smile upon you.”

There was a mystery lurking in her words, but there are more things to worry about. Who is the hidden god? What beliefs do they carry here in the ‘ Labyrinth Country ’?

I’d like to know more, but it would be better by doing it one at a time.

Finally, it’s time to see what my job is all about.

I handed the license to Louisa and had her mark the location of the mercenary guild then thanked her before leaving the counter.

I stood up and move to a wall not clearly visible from others, browsed the licenses’ skill page and checked the skills available.

◆ Available Skills ◆

Skill	Description
<i>Support Defense 1</i>	Reduce damage received by an allied member by 10 points.
<i>Support Attack 1</i>	Give a 10-point attack bonus to an allied member.
<i>Aid Recovery 1</i>	Allied member recovers 5 points of heath every 30 seconds.
<i>Behind the Frontlines</i>	Consumes 5 points of Magical Power. Visibility extends to the rear for a certain period of time.
Remaining skill points: 2	

(.....Just how much would be a 10 point damage?)

Since the damage display function is not available in the license, there is no other choice but to know how much 10 points deals through experience. I’m not even sure how much my physical strength is.

10 Damage for a “dekopin”^[1] would be useless isn’t it? I’m sorry for this, but once I recruit a Lizardfolk, I will need to check and gauge the strength of the damage from a weak enemy.

(“Behind the Frontlines” is a skill that allows the rearguard who is low on physical strength to be wary of his surroundings..... I may be able to use this, but first, I need to test “Support Defense 1” and recovery by using “Aid Recovery 1”. Will the recovery process be put on hold if I use it?)^[2]

If I have a wound salve, it may still be too early to select “Aid Recovery 1”. I hesitantly spent a point for “Support Defense 1”. I also wanted to select the “Support Attack 1” too, but I would rather want to use a valuable skill point carefully.

At the moment, there is no noticeable change. Everyone around me doesn’t even realize I’ve selected some skills.

If I organize a party, I’ll be clear about whether or not I could get along well with them. I checked the three “copper mercenary tickets” I got from Louisa, and left the place in full determination.

Chapter 4

Hiring a Mercenary

The Labyrinth Country is a fortress city enclosed by an exceptionally lengthy wall.

I don't know the details of the countless entrances to the labyrinths here. Anyway, there are walls at the ends of the Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern regions. From there, it is said that it is impossible to go beyond.

The Labyrinth Country is parted in eight districts clockwise from the north and we are currently in the 7th District. Situated here are some of the Beginner Star Labyrinths. My objective is to reach the entrance to "Plains of Dawn".

Previously, Louisa took my license and drew the map where the mercenary guild is located. It was located near a Monster Saboteurs Yard and a Slave market. A redhead woman greeted me as I went in.

"Are you a novice? There seems to be a lot of reincarnators this time. You got quite the nerve to wander here alone."

"Is the vicinity around here dangerous?"

"No, not really, but to a certain extent. Sometimes, reincarnators who see the front of the Monster Saboteurs Yard get frightened, then they get scared to proceed onto the labyrinth"

The woman wearing an eyepatch says in a wry smile. She wore a leather-like armor but her abdominal muscles were exposed. Moderately built, she seems quite powerful like an amazon.

"Mu..... do you know what's good with these muscles? To a seeker, these muscles are the last things that they can rely on the labyrinth. Keep that in mind."

"Hahaha, I'm not a vanguard and I definitely need to work my body. I was dulled by the convenience of desk work."

“That’s for sure, in your current training condition, an attack from a small animal-type monster coming the shallow depths of the Beginner Labyrinth could even prove to be a threat. Here’s some advice, avoid taking damage until you reach Level 3. Take a single blow and you die.”

The mention of death here comes easily like it’s just a natural thing. I turned the page of my license. My level and job were displayed and below were red and blue bars. Below that, a small back circle with the number 10. Red should be **Health**, Blue is **Magic**, and the Black circle would probably be the **Experience** value.

“What? Did you receive any orientation from the seekers’ guild? Who is your guild officer?”

“Uhm, no, I forgot to ask. Louisa is in charge of me.”

“Oh, I see. If it’s Louisa you can depend on her, she’s a five year veteran. Not many fledgelings could be assigned to such an officer.”

“I got this copper ticket from Louisa. It’s a special measure and I’m not going to be spoiled by her time and again.”

The woman handed me a board she was holding when I handed her a ticket. There were several pieces of paper bound to it which had inline character strings.

“I haven’t introduced myself yet. My name is Leila and I am the Deputy Guild Master of this Mercenary Guild. I am acquainted to the seekers’ guild officers since I am also their regular customer.”

“You knew Louisa didn’t you?”

“Yes, she was also a seeker but now retired. She now assists other seekers. I can also say that for the demi-humans here. Now then, what kind of Mercenary are you looking for?”

“I need a Lizardfolk who could be a vanguard. It’s also here on your list.”

Leila looks at me, down and apologetic. Perhaps they are all hired and there’s none remaining?

“I’m sorry to inform you, but they are all out. Male Lizardfolks have good body constitution.”

“Do you have... a warrior-type?”

“That job is called a “Rogue”. Neither a Vanguard nor a Rearguard but a Middle-guard. They can hold certain amount of armor but they fall behind specialized warriors. Their hand dexterity is inferior to a thief, but they can use bows and in that sense you can call it a versatile job. It’s a very rare yet unpopular job for a Lizardfolk. Beginner seekers prefer more of those with a specialized skill.”

Is that what’s left of them? The number of tickets are limited. Definitely, the one who comes first will clearly choose the Lizardfolk of the finest war potential.

“Can a Rogue Lizardfolk use a shield?”

“Well they are equipped with leather bucklers. Although the performance is not the best, it will be good enough for the Plains of Dawn. Just be sure to take care because the ability to endure blows with a shield depends on the physical ability of the person.”

Considering the capabilities of the Lizardfolk, I’ll just ask them to deal those blows with the lesser risk while trying to use “Support Defense 1” so that I won’t waste my time waiting for an opportunity.

“There are other demi-humans for hire but their levels are high. Considering your level gap, they might get estranged and not listen to your instructions. This Lizardfolk is more suitable. Level 3. They will listen to what you will say.”

“Thank you! Let me hire this Lizardfolk.”

“Great! I’ll bring them in. Wait here.”

There were other seekers who came to the guild to hire mercenaries, but they were accommodated by the rest of the staff members. Am I perhaps lucky enough to have a personal correspondence with the Deputy Guild Master?

I waited for a bit inside the recruitment office building. After a while, together with Leila is a Lizardfolk and it’s different from what I had imagined.



(..... Lizard cosplay!?)

When it's a Lizardfolk, it's literally a Lizard Man. We usually imagine a lizard with a humanlike characteristics.

What Leila brought was a "Person" no matter how much I scrutinize it, she's a human female lizard with a lizard head mask and equipped with lizard leather.

"As I have thought, you got surprised. She's a demi-human. A demi-human is an altered figure of a human who got defeated inside the labyrinth. It is impossible to revive the dead in Labyrinth Country, but you can turn them back to their former selves if you can revert their subversion."

"Are you taking care of the Lizardfolk?"

The use of "Slavery Brands" for demi-humans are not forbidden. I wish I could communicate with them, but basically they only work on the orders of others. When it comes to fighting, they will fight voluntarily in accordance to their instincts.

(..... This development was not expected. It's not a human being and it's a legitimate story, no matter how I look at it.)

"Equipment such as snakehead masks can't be removed unless the "principal" takes them off. Some people grow curious of their appearance – what they look like under the hood. The slave brands allows the demi-humans to defend their identities. On some occasions, I go out to foil those who lay their hands on the demi-humans they hired. I composed a contract to avoid such things."

I certainly am curious what is under the snakehead mask. The lizard leather equipment has completely traced the contours of her body. There is also a notch from her lower belly to her chest. The equipment on her hands and foot does not obstruct her skin. Everything about her equipment doesn't fail to impress me. When I gazed upon the apathetic eyes on the snakehead mask though, it gave off a strange feeling. I began to feel disheartened.

I signed the contract and promised not to inflict harm on the demi-human.

◆ Party ◆

1. Arihito: ※◆\$□ Level 1
2. Theresa: Rogue Level 3 Mercenary

(I still can't read my job. I wonder if it's spoken as "Rearguard". The Lizardfolk's name is a female name. I wonder if Theresa is European.)

"Leila, does the rank change when I replace the number of members in the party?"

"No, it's just a confirmation of the party members on that page. The ranks will be displayed on the other pages as rows where you decide the member positions. A mercenary should also work to maintain their ranks. Even training is necessary for a flesh-and-human person."

(I see... Ah, everyone is in the front row. Done... now fixed.)

◆ Battle Positions ◆

- 1: Arihito: Rearguard
- 2: Theresa: Vanguard

A while ago, I did not designate the Vanguard position so that she would not go out too much in front. First of all, I want her to stand in front of me to see the effect of "Support Defense 1" up close.

Lizardfolk—rather Theresa in lizard-suit, would it be okay for her to be my friend? She's staring at me silently—I can't tell where those eyes are looking.

"Erm... My name is Arihito. Nice meeting you, Theresa."

"....."

It took a while for Theresa to grab my hand. When she did, she didn't hold back with her grip then put all her might into shaking. I found myself a powerful partner.

"By the way, when mercenaries are put in danger, they are automatically transferred to the mercenary guild. Some troublesome seekers deliberately imperil them to facilitate their return. Let me remind you that Karma rises when you do that."

"Yes, I understand. When we're done exploring, I'll return Theresa in one piece."

“Well, you’re quite the pleasant young man. There was a woman who was alone headed to the Labyrinth, is that your acquaintance? If you can find her in the dungeon, tell her that it is very dangerous at Level 1 for any position.”

Is it, perhaps, section chief Igarashi? She said she’d join another party, so maybe it’s different?

(Well, when we are in trouble, we look for out each other, we want to help when we see someone who is in danger.)

First and foremost, you should know how capable your party is.

While walking, Theresa trailed slightly from behind. Only her mouth is seen from the mask and I have been drawn to her emptiness for quite a while. She is the only companion I have for now. While pondering about how both of us can return safely, we hiked our way to the first dungeon.

Chapter 5

Arms Dealer

There are a lot of labyrinths but it has always been the tradition for novice seekers to visit the labyrinth called the “Plains of Dawn”.

After our departure from the mercenary guild, there was this large stairway covered in grass that looked like the entrance to the labyrinth. People gathered around it. It was like that of a tourist attraction similar to a historical site.

“Are you a novice seeker? If you don’t have a weapon, you can drop by the stalls at the opposite side of the street. They won’t charge any for your first weapon.”

“Oh, that’s great. Thank you!”

“So you hired a mercenary? As a seeker... the course can be grueling at times. Do your best out there.”

The young adventurer seems to have experience, but he might have just entered the ‘beginners’ labyrinth recently.

I caught a glimpse of Suzuna and Elysha, but my section chief was not around. Elysha is currently guiding Suzuna on the arms dealers. They might be selecting a suitable weapon for a Shrine Maiden. Starters usually wear basic stuff but Suzuna chooses an oak staff which in my opinion should only be suitable for magicians.

“Onii-san, what’s your job? Would you like me to select a weapon for you?”

A voice among the weapons stalls called me out. It took a while for me to locate her but there she was, wearing a turban although her ethnicity was Japanese. I could clearly tell that she was way younger than me or Suzuna. She seemed to be a pleasant girl with black hair and a bob-cut.

“You will be surprised how many from Japan resides here. It’s the same with the other nations too. Everyone here just loves to transact with someone who holds a license.”

“Did you become an arms dealer after you reincarnated?”

“Yes, my parents actually owned a Sport Supply House, so I had always aspired to become a “Merchant”.”

So some of the seekers find jobs closer to positions held by the residents of the town. Sadly I’m not a business minded person, so the most convenient way for me to earn right now is to defeat some demons.

“There are a lot of weapons here ranging from melee, long-range, and medium-range weapons but which of these do you prefer?”

“Let’s see... I guess I’ll go with that orthodox blade?”

“A blade is it? Umm, if it’s onii-chan’s job... Oh, I think you can equip anything! “All Weapons”? That’s amazing!”

“It’s not that great of a job. If I can use anything, wouldn’t that make me strange?”

It seems that the “Rearguard” job can equip a wide array of weapons. Wouldn’t that mean a rearguard need not choose a weapon? Regardless, it’s probably better to familiarize myself using bow-type weapons should I choose to help from the back. While searching for a weapon on the stall, I happen to set my eyes on a slingshot.

“Then... how about this slingshot?”

“Oh, it’s a good weapon but the problem with it is its terrible accuracy and I lack the job skills to use it.”

“Is that so? But you can still equip it, and even without skills, you can practice.”

I took the sling, or rather the sturdy wooden pachinko. I didn’t know what type of metal the ammo were but it came in a bag of 20 bullets.

“Let me remind you that on your next refill of ammo, you will need to pay the cost.”

“Let’s see. If I manage to use this, I’ll be in need of a lot of ammo. I’ll need to earn the money to buy them.”

“Ah... I almost forgot to hand you this bag. Place in here all the loot you acquire from the labyrinth. If you sell collected materials from the demons you’ve defeated, then you will be able to purchase the bullets you need.”

What if we manage to defeat a large-sized demon? Will we have a hard time bringing back those loot? When the time comes, it may be necessary to have a procedure in efficiently transporting materials from the labyrinth.

“Well then, I wish you the best of luck!”

“By the way, I have yet to introduce myself. My name is Atobe Arihito.”

“I’m Shinonogi Madoka... It’s been a long time since I last spoke my full name.”

Now that she mentions it, it has also been a while for me too. In a way, introducing myself made me sure to burn into memory the kanji for my name. If I will live here in Labyrinth Country, I should always prompt myself not to forget it.

“See you... Shinonogi-san.”

“Ah, it’s okay to call me Madoka. Everyone in town call each other by their given names, right?”

“Oh, Erm... Madoka-san, it’s okay. Don’t be too conscious of how to address me too, just because I’m older.”

“Eh, well I would also prefer to call you Arihito. Using “-chan” just feels too embarrassing. Using “-san” feels a bit awful, so...”

Back in Japan, we were always mindful in using honorifics and how to properly address one’s name.

The day might already be long due when we exit the labyrinth but I’d like to come and say my greetings once I come back to see you.

“Oh, sorry to keep you waiting. Shall we go Theresa?”

Theresa stares then gives a slight nod. As we approached the entrance of the labyrinth,

we came across this older guy who seems to be a guide.

“Rookies again? You’re the seventh one to enter today. I’ve heard there were around thirty reincarnators this time around, but a bunch of them already got daunted. Only true seekers continue exploring.”

“Did I perhaps make a wrong decision for being a supporter?”

There stood this man with gray beard and hair. His physique is good and he was holding an axe. He seems to be an active seeker.

“There are times when seekers like you get exhausted inside the Labyrinth. Some seekers, like me, make a living by rescuing those who have become incapable inside this Beginner’s Labyrinth. Oh, by the way. I’m Rival.”

“My name is Arihito, it’s nice to meet you.”

“Alihi... Can I just call you Al... or Richter?”

“Yea... No, I too find it difficult to pronounce Rival, so may I request you to keep my name as it is as well? Anyway, I have some things I need to ask...”

“What? If you’re asking me to be a guardian, that would be impossible. I’m at Level 5 and the experience we gather in this beginner labyrinth will not have the slightest effect on you. The experience of the party is calculated based on the highest level of the person. Even if I defeat a low level demon, you will hardly get any experience.”

His answer didn’t match my expectations. News to me at the very least. So as a general rule, high-level seekers cannot do power leveling with lower leveled seekers.

“Thanks for telling me that... By the way, how much is a 10-point damage?”

“Hmm?... Ha ha ha... Are you misunderstanding this for a game? It’s not even possible to register a number from a demons attack. If you look at the health displayed on your license, you can gauge the amount of damage the enemy does based on your defensive power.”

(So does that mean that numbers are not being used on the Skill Description for other positions to determine damage? Is it some kind of skill unique only to a “Rearguard”?)

“First of all, you can try to receive the brunt of attacks from some small fry demons like “Watadama”. Though It is not advisable to take even a single hit, but in all of the labyrinths in this country, only unprepared amateurs die from its attack. You can’t measure it via numbers. The pain inflicted determines the enemy’s strength. When you receive the first blow, stay strong and don’t be reckless. People die from carelessness.

“Thank you very much! You’ve been a great help.”

“That’s the spirit! So you’re with a mercenary, huh. Arihito, both of you, tread carefully and be sure to return home. and if you see some seekers who are in danger, please don’t hesitate to call us. We do patrols regularly, but some things may be left unnoticed.”

“I understand. I’ll be sure to call for relief when something gets dangerous, Rival.”

Rival inattentively laughed it off then gave me a pat on the shoulder. Several of his colleagues were with him as well. They all make a living of providing assistance to seekers. Wearing their best faces, the middle aged men then sent me off.

“Oh, by the way Rival, did you notice a party composed of novices. They entered not too long ago? It’s just that...”

“Oh, those guys... I ran into a “NAMED” before I got to them. I had to flee.”

(What then happened to those people I saw at the guild earlier? Is that “NAMED” a powerful demon? They say that chances of dying here is high if you’re abandoned.)

I hope that everyone would be safe, not just the section chief and Suzuna, but the other reincarnators as well. I can’t ruin myself in the labyrinth, but I have one more purpose.

Chapter 6

Support Defense

Accompanied by Theresa, we gradually descended the long grassy staircase. I was expecting that it was an exploration underground, but what has come into our view was a bright luminous field.

This is the “Plains of Dawn”. The scene brought about by the labyrinth defied reasonable common sense.

The area is not composed of plains entirely, but trees grew sporadically. I switched the screen on my license and the map of the terrain was displayed.

It was vast. I reckon traveling on foot the entire day would not be enough. I even thought that we were transported to another place from descending the stairs. To my surprise however, such an expanse existed below the city.

“Watadama... If that’s a small fry, then...”

Even without instructing her, Theresa traverses the direction that I wanted to go. While scouting the area, she halted, then equipped her buckler and short sword.

◆Demons Encountered◆

Watadama | Level 1 | *Caution* / Drop: ???

What appeared from a patch of grass looked like a lovely, fluffy stuffed animal.

Taking a glance at my license display, the demon assumed a state of ‘Caution’. The display shows it slightly reddish. — Is it angry?

I was right.

“.....”

The bouncing Watadama ragingly vaulted towards Theresa.

She held her buckler and received the Watadamas' tackle. The impact made noises so violent that I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It was so explosive that it could pierce my eardrums and destroy the buckler with single hit.

(This isn't funny at all... for a small fry to have such overwhelming attack...!?)

Her buckler can only but protect her so much. After inspecting my license display, the red bar under her name already got reduced by around twenty percent.

The health bar, or rather, her life... the very thing itself has been shaved of. It's not the best time to be amused.

Staggering, Theresa bravely strikes back at the Watadama she failed to slay in a single slash. Again, after the bouncing thing landed, it vaulted in terrifying speed.

("This time... we'll gain the upper hand with "Rearguard" skills!")

"Theresa, Support!"

With Theresa in the front line, I'll be responsible in protecting her by activating the skills I acquired.

◆ Activity Log ◆

Rearguard – [Support Defense 1] :[Activate]: target → Theresa

I was expecting the same bone shattering noise as the watadama hit its target. This time however, it was different.

Just before reaching Theresa, the watadama crashed straight into something and it was thrown-off.

A transparent barrier materialized in front of her. I could not make good sense of it since I was positioned at her back. Similarly, she was unable to comprehend what unfolded and for a quick moment, she was left aghast.

"Theresa, prepare yourself after I launch an attack!"

"....."

I cut from Theresa's back after placing a bullet on the slingshot then launched the bullet from the sling aiming it on the watadama. It was a clean shot. The bullet hit its target.

".....!"

Theresa remained silent even after the attack stopped. And in a brief moment, making sure that the bullet stunned the watadama, she brandishes her short sword.

◆ Activity Log ◆

Arihito attack hits "Watadama"

Theresa attack hits "Watadama"

1 "Watadama" defeated

"Hey... Did we do it?"

Theresa looks back at me then nodded slightly. The watadama, which was no longer moving was actually some type of rodent covered entirely with long fur.

After inspecting it closer, the rodent looked atrocious. Even if it was wild, I felt guilty at first for defeating it because it somehow looked like a pet. However, I felt better knowing that it was a demon.

"I'm sorry Theresa. If only I used my skill from the beginning..."

Theresa did not answer— she just shook her head slightly. Was that a Yes? Or a no? Until a while ago, she may just have been obedient to me as her employer.

If I only have the skill, I can take the watadama's materials. Sadly, I can't do that. What I can do though is put it in the leather bag as it is. If I bring it back to the "Monsters Demolition Shop", will the cost of the sling's bullet come back? — Nevemind. The bullets might only be dented. I can just take them out and reuse them. We need all the spare bullets we can get if we want to have a fighting chance.

"Theresa, is your wound okay? Let's get out of here and have that treated."

She shakes her head. It seems that she is still all right.

—Which reminds me...

Since the skill I used on Theresa suppresses damage, the second attack on her should have lesser damage, but her health remained the same.

I assume the damage inflicted on Theresa might have been less than 10. Nullifying a damage range of 1 to 10 can be a blessing. Support Defense 1 could be an invaluable skill.

I need to test the limits of the skill. And to do that, I'll have to ask Theresa to hunt more watadama. Foes stronger than watadama will be out of our hunting list for now.

I reckon the attack damage from watadama is within my skill's capacity. So no matter how strong a watadama gets, we can do battles without worry of getting mortally injured. Also, the more encounters, the more materials we get to collect. Their market value will also command our duty to hunt them.

"Alright, let's try hunting some more."

Theresa nodded. As we strolled closer to a big tree...

"—Kyaaah!"

"Whoa... it's a **[[NAMED]]**!"

I heard a woman screaming with the familiar voice of the section chief. I also heard from among them, the voice of a senior seeker from the guild whom I recall that offered to be a guide.

"This is bad... Theresa, let's go!"

We rushed to where the commotion was. As we approached the tree, there was a confine on the other side where I could see the seekers who seem to have been driven away by something. The section manager was quick on her feet, while another novice was falling behind while they try escape.

It resembled watadama. It was deep-red. It was agile and it caught up with the fleeing seekers at a tremendous speed. They could be attacked at any given moment.

Notes:

Watadama – ワタダマ – cotton lumps, cotton balls.

NAMED – 名前つき – instead of a regular demon name, they have proper names. Ex.
A dog can be called Potchi.

Chapter 7

The Rearguard's Duty

A Watadama's normal attack is not really that life-threatening to a Level 1 novice even if he receives the attack head-on, but this red watadama is way larger and faster than the one we had previously defeated. Its agility was probably thirty percent quicker.

(He's reached the end of the line. Moreover, that "NAMED" is determined to do something!)

◆ Activity Log ◆

"★Redface" activates "Boomerang Dive" → "Budwick's Party"

Redface. It's a special demon with a unique name. The way it almost instantaneously activated its skill terrifies me.

"Whoa...!"

The demon had tremendous acceleration. It launched itself like a boomerang then swept in an elliptical course overwhelming the fleeing party. The attack was ruthless. With full strength, the Redface drove itself towards everyone.

In an instant, the attack dispersed the already demoralized party.

"NAMED" should not appear in the beginners' labyrinth. Its strength clearly outclasses a novice seeker... a generous amount of life would be wasted defeating it. Did they encounter it? Or did they just ran out of luck? How did they even meet this monster? Did they jinx their adventure?

"Tch... Haah... haah... I don't want to die... I don't want to..."

◆ Activity Log ◆

"Budwick" uses "Scroll of Return"

The party of "Budwick" has left the labyrinth...

Budwick group teleports away but the section chief got left behind. With the party deserting her, she's left to fend for herself.

"To be left maliciously like this...!"

◆ Activity Log ◆

[[Kyouka]] uses [[Blink Step]]→[[Boomerang Dive]] – Evaded

(Igarashi, did you evade using a Valkyrie skill?)

Adeptly activating a recently acquired skill in the most crucial moment is most impressive, section chief.

Without a doubt that was tier 1 magic, but how much more can she use them? The more powerful the magic, the faster she'll get exhausted.

"Section chief! Please run away. We'll take it from here..."

"Atobe... you should run! I'm not going to lose to this!"

It was my first seeing her go so emotional. We began our encounter. I positioned behind Theresa and with my slingshot, I started shooting bullets towards the Redface.

◆ Activity Log ◆

"Arihito" attacks "★Redface". No damage

(Tch...!)

My best shot had no effect. The bullet landed perfectly as confirmed with its impact noise only to get deflected.

The Redface then focused its attention to our party. It only needed a bounce to engage its super-acceleration. Theresa withstands the attack and suppresses it. If the Redface doesn't show some weaknesses, we're facing defeat.

(Theresa can be teleported back, but what will happen to her if before returning, she takes a damage that she couldn't endure? She died once and lost her voice. If she falls again...)

"Take this, you rodent!"

◆ Activity Log ◆

“Kyouka” activates “Thunderbolt”: target → “★Redface”. Hit

She previously explained that a Valkyrie could use some magic. The lightning that hit the Redface should be one of her skills.

(Why are you helping me? You have always despised me. But...)

After landing her attacks, the monster changed target for aggression. It bounced back and directed its “Boomerang Dive” towards the section chief.

It would end tragically if she receives that attack. The demon had so much power it ruined an entire party. It’s a walking catastrophe.

Moreover, she no longer has the capacity to activate 『Blink Step』. Wielding her spear in a firm grip, she thrusts forward with all her resolve.

“Hiyaah!”

I need to cancel that “Boomerang Dive” or her spear won’t penetrate.

◆ Activity Log ◆

“Kyouka” attacks “★Redface”. No Damage

“★Redface” attacks “Kyouka”. Hit

“Boomerang Dive” shattered Igarashi-san’s spear. The attack blew her about, swallowed her words, and bowled her towards the grass.



“What are you doing...?”

As the battle noises echoed in my head, I felt my consciousness snap. The initial plan was to assist the section chief after the ridiculously strong redface destroyed her party. She instead took center stage and gets critically wounded.

“Section chief... what are you doing? ... You’ll die...”

Even in here, am I still this useless? I just realized how my demon boss protected me. This is truly shameful.

I could use Theresa’s strength, but she may be killed. I should be smart with my decision.

“Support Defense 1” cancels the Redfaces’ attacks. I’ll take “Support Attack 1” and prepare to penetrate the demon’s defenses.

If Theresa makes a blunder here, I get killed along with her. The enemy is not so lenient and wait for Rival’s rescue.

Theresa, as a mercenary, will not hesitate to offer with her life.

This is so twisted. She was still nodding like the usual.

◆ Activity Log ◆

“Theresa” activates “Accel Dash”

“Theresa!”

(What are you trying to tell me? Do you want to aid Igarashi and make time to escape?)

Theresa’s job is not of a close type fighter yet she approached the Redface that was preparing to land its final blow on the still breathing Igarashi-san.

(Rouge skills – until now, she has not used it yet.)

Theresa, too, is trying to selflessly protect another person. But after protecting that person, she would care nothing about what that person thinks.

(If that's the case, I'm going to protect you!)

It's not just exclusive to my partner in the frontlines. Every "Party Member" to my "Front" are treated as vanguards.

Now I understand why Theresa distanced herself away from me.

My support defense is a "Barrier" that can be used to defend companions in battle.

"Theresa, Support...!"

The Redface reacted swiftly to Theresa's sudden approach, attacking with "Boomerang Dive"

(That one attack sent Budwick's party escaping, but that skill-).

In comparison to the ramming attack of the watadama with a "Chance to Break Buckler", the power level might be the same.

◆ Activity Log ◆

"★Redface" activates "Boomerang Dive" → "Theresa". No Damage

(—No damage... with Theresa's defense along with my Support Defense...)

Even if there is a far gap between me and Theresa, I was able to use "Support Defense 1" ensuring her safety.

Let's assume the damage that Theresa receives from the regular watadama without using "Support Defense 1" to be 1 or 2. If I can suppress the damage by 5 to 10 points, the damage can be nullified.

(If it's 10 and Theresa only has a maximum health of 20, then 10? Wouldn't that be ridiculous? It's too huge of a number in this world!)

"Support Defense 1" repelled the Redface's attack. As it went airborne, it provided an opportunity for assault.

(“Support Attack 1” is needed to defeat the monster.)

“Go, Theresa!” I will support you!”

“...!”

◆ Activity Log ◆

“Arihito” activates “Support Attack 1” → [[Theresa]]

“Theresa” attacks “★Redface”: No Damage + (Support Damage 10)

(Normal Attack does not have any effect... however, the 10 point support damage connects!!!)

Finally, something we badly needed, but this alone will not suffice.

Theresa quickly extended continuous slashes and gave chase to the now retreating Redface.

◆ Activity Log ◆

“Theresa” attacks “★Redface” : no damage + (support damage 10)

“Theresa” attacks “★Redface” : no damage + (support damage 10)

1 “★Redface” Defeated

Arihito → Level UP!(2)

We defeated with our own hands a demon that can easily wipe out a party. I wanted to scream for victory but the current situation forbids it.

“Theresa, I’ll keep watch on Igarashi-san. Please go immediately and call Rival-san.”

She follows my instructions and dashes out of the labyrinth.

Igarashi’s collapsed and not faring well. Her arm got badly wounded from the damage she received, so she might have even suffered some broken bones.

“Hnng...”

She’s in severe pain.

Just as I sat in front of the lady who fought with us, I caught a flashback from our

previous lives.

–I punched my time card. When I’m done at work, I’ll have an overtime of two hours.

–Have you taken a rest from your cold? Please take this energy drink, do your best. Work will be impossible without you.

–Really? I appreciate that you take charge of the rear. This job is hard to ask from the others.

(I haven’t forgotten how bossy you get. But my conscience will bother me if I leave you alone.)

I anticipated a reward as my level went up. As I turn over the page of my license, the number of skill points that can be allocated has increased by two.

“Aid Recovery 1”. To use this skill, I need Igarashi-san to join my party but she’s still delirious.

“Igarashi-san, it’s me, Atobe. Help is coming soon, but I can only do first aid for now. Can you please join my party for that?”

I had to ask twice since Igarashi did not react the first time as if she could not comprehend my words. A few moments after, she slightly opened her eyes and gave a weak nod of approval.

“Lewd things... If you do... I’ll sue you...”

She puts her life on the line to protect others but she can still act like this.

After enlisting her in the party, I checked her red bar and it dropped below 70%. Using the new skill I have acquired, I began to heal her.

(My current position for the section chief is “Rearguard”...will it be okay?)

I got nervous thinking the skill didn’t work but Igarashi started moving as she tried her best to rise. I quickly move behind and assisted her as she parked half of her body.

“.....”

She remained silent as the mood evolved.

What's the meaning of this? It's like I'm being embracing her from behind.

Would it be a ' Rearguard 's job to watch her as she falls asleep while lying sideways? I'm not certain if there are means to verify this, but waiting for 5 points of health to recover within 30 seconds is taking an awful lot of time.

Chapter 8

The Headmost Exploration Comes to an End

After observing the changes in the red health bar, I examined the logs recorded during the previous battle. “Aid Recovery 1” had proven itself invaluable for a novice seeker’s skills.

In a span of 30 seconds, the section chief’s health was gradually restored and the activation of “Aid Recovery 1” demonstrated its immediate effect.

◆ Activity Log ◆

Arihito’s “Aid Recovery 1” activated → Kyouka health is being restored

(At last, I was able to verify it with this.)

The section chief’s health bar that was decreased by about 70 percent, recovered above 50 percent in one go. Her breathing had normalized from being winded. Her arm previously swelled a lot too, but it’s now in better shape, leaving just a small red bruise.

Assuming a Level 1 seeker has 10 health points, then 5 health points recovery in just 30 seconds would be more than just convenient. If the Redface’s single attack back then had a base damage of 10 points or greater, it would have been futile. Lucky for us, the demon’s attacks dealt lesser than anticipated.

At that moment, the section chief was in a stupor. The intense pain ought to have been traumatic. Her health got restored, but maybe this is the skill’s limit. Could there be another skill meant to treat status ailments?

While she rests, I took the opportunity to grab the Redface’s corpse then jammed it into the leather bag. This fluffy rodent covered in red hair rodent still appeared atrocious even after its defeat. Bulkier than a usual watadama, the leather bag which was supposed to house up to four regular watadama, brimmed to an instant.

“Hey... are you alright? Allow me to take you to a healer.”

Theresa comes back with Rival. His companions convoyed the section chief via a stretcher, and Rival enquires me while we are en route.

“What happened out there?! Did you come across a group of watadama?

“Budwick’s party can fill you in on the details. They used a “Scroll of Return” when the “NAMED” demon attacked them.”

“Damn it...! Those “NAMED”. They turn very aggressive once they notice a threat. Encountering them in random inside the labyrinth also doesn’t help. Those guys were aware of it. They were probably in the need of a good sum of money. You guys are lucky as well. Your party managed to escape.

Shall I disclose that we “Defeated” it our encounter to avoid rumors? We wouldn’t even have a chance to beat that “Redface” if not for my odd job.

(I must report the Redface incident to Louisa and I’ll leave it up to her to come up with an official announcement that it has been subjugated.” Budwick’s party messed up but I’ll keep that to myself for now. I’m in no position to criticize them, and besides, I’m not more skillful than any one of them.)

The “Rearguard” skills have its shortcomings too. In times of battle, I’m left to my own devices and that leaves me at a very vulnerable position. I need skills that can keep me bonded to my Vanguard and eliminate the possibility of being flanked. Thus, one of my top priorities is to acquire those skills to patch-up glaring deficiencies.

The Beginner’s Labyrinth can be cleared through teamwork. –The vanguard fights and the rearguard ensures support. The labyrinth won’t prove to be difficult, provided that the enemies won’t deal a damage that exceeds the amount my skill can nullify.

“Support Defense 1” provides a 10 point bonus, but soon enough, we’ll be encountering stronger demons. At its current state, the skill won’t be of much use against attacks from tougher opponents. I do hope “Support Defense 2” provides a larger buff to counter-balance the damage we’ll receive from stronger demons.

Before exiting the labyrinth, we stumbled upon Elysha and Suzuna.

Even though these two were nowhere near us during the encounter with the Redface,

our battle scars were a dead giveaway. I'm sure they'll go curious so unless I want myself to be caught by the tail, I need to be consistent while being extra careful in what to tell to them.

So Elysha's ties her long golden hair into two pigtails whenever she's fighting. A twin tail princess knight. –Now isn't the best time to be fantasizing.

“What the hell happened...?”

“A “NAMED” appeared. We were put in a difficult situation but we managed to deal with it.”

“...Did you deal with it? The red watadama? That thing only spawns like once a month. Even Level 3 parties sometimes get in trouble. It's just too fast that it's difficult to handle making it more difficult to escape. If you dealt with it, how...? and in what way...?”

Elysha seems quite familiar with the Redface. She inquired us with genuine curiosity as to how we have miraculously survived. She was quite nosey and it left me with nothing more but an agape expression.

“...I'm sorry. I may not look like it, but I've been oriented about those things and I'm just thankful that I'm still standing here talking to you. What's more amazing though is I've just reincarnated and I was able to escape certain death.”

“No apologies needed. You're lucky. I need not worry even if the two of you decide to hunt here for another time. The red one won't be spawning anytime soon and that puts everyone at ease.”

Our exchange is a delicate one. We wouldn't want to scare Suzuna, who is also a novice seeker. Moreover, there is also the possibility of this Redface respawning.

(So this confirms that “NAMED” demons tend to pursue the first opponent they come in contact with. It's a relief that the aggressive, red watadama is out for now, but there will always be a time that another “NAMED” demon would appear.)

“Thank you for your concern.”

She's a quite a leveled seeker. As a novice, I'm humbled.

“Oh, I guess I might have talked too much. Please allow me to introduce my party. My name is Elysha. May I know yours?”

“Arihito. It may be a bit hard to pronounce but please call me Ari-hito. I’m pretty sure you’re Suzuna.”

“Well, yes. That person who was carried a while ago was also a reincarnated person, right?”

“Oh, yes, still in a daze but she’s okay. She’s out of danger.”

“Did you use potions? They’re quite valuable items. Have you got a handful of them?”

Elysha continued to look at my face and prepared herself to ask about the obvious question –The details regarding my job.

“No way... for such a capable rearguard to...”

“Is something the matter? If you have questions, I’ll be glad to answer.”

“It’s nothing... really... If there’s news of a capable rearguard, it’ll definitely make the headline.”

As I recall, Elysha wanted to party with an excellent rearguard. She might be willing to reorganize her party once I get to explain my job.

I have concerns though. She appears to be a solo seeker but there seems to be a risk being enlisted as her rearguard. Not knowing that risk makes me uncomfortable. Suzuna is with her, and she’s exposed to that risk. It can be managed though, but it just leaves a bad taste in the mouth when all I can do is just hope for the best.

(In theory, Elysha can be an excellent vanguard but we have to manage the risks that she carries.)

I’m gathering opportunities here and I have decided to prioritize the section chief. If I ever get the chance to meet Elysha and Suzuna again, I bet we can chat a little bit more.

“Well then, I’ll be on my way.”

“Ah, I was really glad that I was able to talk with a fellow reincarnated person from Japan. I hope we can get to formalize a greeting someday.”

“Of course! Let’s have a hearty chat next time!”

(Because we’ve just got reincarnated and still coping in this world.)

Suzuna bows her head repeatedly then proceeded with Elysha. It will be their pilot dive into the labyrinth today, and they will have to exit a little later.

I paced toward Theresa who was there waiting. But when I tried to talk to her... I noticed that there was something different about her.

“Theresa?”

“.....”

She didn’t say anything but instead, she affixed her gaze at me. Well, since I’m a bit accustomed to it already, it was not a problem. She just came around my back and accompanied me quietly.

“Erm... I will be using mercenary tickets tomorrow. Will you come again with me?”

It took a while for her to respond. Mercenaries might not have the privileges to choose an employer. That’s what I was thinking –Then she nods over and again. I guess, she’ll join me on my adventure tomorrow.

“Well then, it’s set. For now, I will say my goodbyes to you at the mercenary guild. Promise me that you’ll come with me again tomorrow.”

Theresa didn’t answer, but instead, she gave me a wry smile. She then fled and left me to chase after Rival’s group who were exiting the labyrinth.

◆Seeker’s Accomplishment◆

5 points awarded for reaching the “Plains of Dawn” – 1F

10 points awarded to “Arihito” reaching Level 2

5 points awarded for “Watadama” defeated.

200 points awarded for subjugating “★Redface”

The “Credibility” of Theresa has increased. 50 points awarded

The “Credibility” of Kyouka has increased. 10 points awarded

Seekers Contribution Points..... 280

Chapter 9

Credibility

Shortly, after leaving the labyrinth, Leila, the mercenary guild's associate director received me after I escorting Theresa back to the guild.

"That's so brave of you to return from engaging a battle. It has only been over an hour. Theresa, bring those weapons you used to the blacksmith. Remove the blood stains on them. Those need proper maintenance."

Theresa nods repeatedly, not moving an inch while she kept her eyes glued on me.

"Hmm... Typically, you would leave now without saying anything. Is there anything that you would like to tell me?"

"....."

"Even if you could say that there is, there's no way I would be able to tell. Oh, how I wish you had a telepathy skill."

Today, we've achieved a lot together. We fought side-by-side and defeated a formidable enemy. She fought in the frontline and I supported her. It makes a bit lonely now that I will have to part from her.

Fortunately, I can still hire her. I still have two remaining tickets. I wonder if there other ways to procure more tickets?

"Leila, I wish to hire Theresa again tomorrow. I have two tickets remaining. Do you know where I could get them?"

"Well, first of all, you can't reserve the mercenaries you wish to hire. You only get to pick your mercenary when it's time for you to hire them at the guild. This ensures that every seeker experiences fair treatment especially when employment opportunities are concerned. You can buy tickets at the seekers guild and you are only limited to 10 tickets per month. This ensures that seekers can grow and minimize their sole reliance

on mercenaries. However, there are some rare instances that some seekers would frequent the reliance on them.”

(In other words... Even if I am able to fight alongside Theresa, it won't be possible to make her a regular party member.)

Theresa had been watching us for the whole span of our conversation, but she finally heads towards the reception area.

Leila then looked at me with interest then gave out a faint smile.

“Ehh, this is rare. It seems that you're growing fond of that lizardfolk.”

“E-erm... Is that so?”

“Originally, these jobs were only performed by monsters. I personally do not favor the use of demi-humans. To tell you the truth, there are a lot of mysteries involving their spiritual structures. Some people grow fond of demi-humans even if they lack communication skills like ‘Telepathy’ and they prefer them over the use of tamed monsters.”

Well, Maybe I do have a single reason as to why I've become fond of her. The logs on the license previously showed the “increase in the credibility” part.

Is this the effect of using “Support Defense 1” and “Support Attack 1” on her? Or just because we're in a party? It might be better to ask Louisa about experience and credibility, just in case.

“Well, if you are interested in her, then that would mean a different story. We can rebrand Theresa's slave crest and set you as her master, but you will have to pay a reasonable price. You will need to set aside one-hundred copper tickets to establish the contract.”

(One-hundred...? A payment for hiring Theresa a hundred times in exchange for letting me have her as a permanent companion? -That's expensive.)

I can only obtain ten tickets monthly and I will have to wait ten full months without even hiring her. I guess I have no other option this time but to ask Louisa.

“I have just recently become a seeker and I can’t prepare the funds needed just yet. To acquire a mercenary also means to take care of her basic needs. Once I’ve gained enough experience as a seeker, allow me to take you up on your offer. I’ll persevere. Besides, based on my experiences with her, the possibility of other seekers buying her would be rather slim.”

Increasing “Credibility” might be difficult but it’s different if we’re compatible. I guess I can understand what Leila is trying to convey. That would likely compel me to hurry up and prepare one-hundred copper tickets at the soonest.

I would be needing at least two more party members since a party consists of a vanguard, middle-guard and a rearguard. Working with Theresa was a good experience even if it was only for a one-time adventure. I wouldn’t be able to make it without her.

“I understand. I’ll acquire those 100 copper tickets as soon as possible.”

“That’s good. I think it will be fine for you to take her tomorrow, but just in case, you have to come early. We open at eight in the morning.”

I bowed my head to Leila and left the mercenary guild. I passed by the dismantler’s shop but I thought it would be best if I show the Redface to Louisa first, since it was displayed that there was a bounty for it. The materials would be a good exhibit and it would show proof that it has been subdued.



Rival and his party was about to leave the Seeker’s Guild when I arrived. It seems that they were able to get the section chief to a healer and now returning to their post near the labyrinth entrance.

“Ah, Arihito, we’ve entrusted the lady seeker to a healer. She will be transferred to an infirmary later. Please try to visit and talk to her soon.”

“Thanks, Rival. I owe you one.”

“Don’t worry about it. It’s our job after all. We could have teleported back using a scroll of return, but it’s rather expensive. Moreover, we would like to avoid a hundred demerits on our contribution. We had no other choice than to rescue and carry her by

feet.”

“That much for using a scroll of return? So Budwick’s party, by using that scroll...”

“It probably cost them demerits and their rank may have fallen. But given the situation of encountering a “NAMED”...it’s matter of life and death. If I were them, I’ll have to reconsider exploring again. They are fond of being guides. It’s nice to have a job waiting for you.”

Some older seekers were convinced that it would be better to guide novice seekers. They might have considered that, but even if they have the means, there is still a risk of encountering demons like the Redface. This should serve me as a reminder.

“Arihito, will you explore the “Plains of Dawn” again tomorrow? Or are you planning on diving on a different labyrinth?”

“I haven’t decided yet, but I guess I’ll have to dive in the same labyrinth.”

“Okay, then if possible, please invite that lady seeker to your party. It seems that she isn’t in any party because she doesn’t specialize in being a vanguard or a rearguard. Maybe there was just an issue in her personality. It’s really dangerous diving solo when you’re Level 1.”

Novice seekers with more specialized jobs easily flock together. That’s what the common sense of many seekers dictate. But just like a Rouge job, Valkyries grow significantly stronger as their level rises. Their situation might only be a handicap being Level 1.

Now, can the section chief get along with me? If it turns out that I get to keep her overbearing attitude in check, having been reincarnated in this labyrinth country might have just lost all meaning.

(No, no, no. I should do away with this kind of thinking. Besides, in the worst case scenario, she truly reveals her good side.)

The section chief did not even flee given her predicament and she tried to face the danger head-on. She was actually prepared to risk life and limb even though she can command others to do her bidding.

However, I still find it difficult to forgive her. I'll listen to what she has to say and if our interests coincide, then we can organize the party.

"Was it some bad relationship you've shared with her in your previous life? There are a lot of people who speak their honest feelings too, once they get reincarnated. Are you sure you can handle her?" –Rival then stares at me with an intrigued face while I was drawing up my decision.

"I hope so, but at least I don't want her to nag about things."

"Oh, hands down already? Well, listen to this old man. I don't even think that she will come to hate the guy who saved her. Ha ha ha, see you! Hang in there, lad..."

Rival has gone and done it now. I won't deny what he said, but it was just necessary that I protected the section chief during that time.

Call it difficult to near impossible, but I just can't imagine the section chief acting friendly or trusting towards me. Much more, to be in the same party and teaming up together. One thing that's questionable though are the logs on the license that firmly displayed that Kyouka's credibility has increased.

"Atobe-sama! Were you injured? Were you poisoned? Oh! Thank god you're okay."

Louisa rushed over frantically, looking at me with a tearful face. She seems to have been worried about my safety because the section chief was unconscious when they rushed her over.

"As you can see, I'm safe and sound. All thanks to Louisa's ticket."

"Well... that kind of... Uhm... All I did was give you directions to get some help from the mercenary guild. That's all. Forget that... what I'm actually talking about is..."

–Louisa spoke with a face that was flushed from all the running she did.

I'm probably going to keep surprising her from this point onwards, but first, I need to let her know of the situation and if possible, share confidential information in the future.

"Can I whisper something to you for a bit, Louisa?"

“Uhm, yes! Is it something confidential?”

“I defeated the Redface, can you verify it?”

She was in for a big surprise. Her eyes enlarged, lips trembled and her knees lost all their strength.

I showed her the leather knapsack containing the yield. At first, she was not able to grasp it but later came into a realization just by paying attention to her surroundings.

“C-Certainly, please proceed to the private room at the back.”

She’s pretended to be calm as much as possible but her voice trembled. Well, I was expecting that would be the case, so I followed Louisa while carrying the knapsack on my shoulder.

Chapter 10

A Seeker's Fruit of Labor

With Louisa guiding the way, we passed through a hall from the guild counter into a private room.

These rooms are being used for deliberations. They may vary in capacity and this depends on the size of the party. I was led in a small room. It had a square table and four chairs. I was asked to take a seat and as I looked around, I found a contraption similar to a weighing scale. This is where they probably place their gathered materials.

(Will it be okay to show the Redface immediately? It might provide a good impression, but I just stuck it in the knapsack and I'm quite worried about its present state.)

Well, it can't be helped. I was just told that I could carry this bag around but I don't have the slightest idea of what it can do. After being seated for a while, Louisa knocked at the door then entered carrying a tray with a glass of tea.

"Please take this glass of tea. It's herbal tea. Do you find herb tea it to your liking?"

"Ah, it's okay. I don't have any particular preferences in teas. Thank you!"

I preferred to have some soda water to drink though. It differs from coffee, and drinking a lot does not affect the liver. It kept me awake during overtime... and even just for a short period of time, it made me forget about being a corporate slave.

The herb tea had this refreshing scent though it was chilled. I have modestly thought that they could only serve tepid drinks at this level of civilization, but I am deeply impressed.

"Shall we get started then? First, please check your license logs."

"Right! Today, there were all sorts of things... something like this..."

At first, I eagerly awaited her feedback, but soon enough I began to get nervous.

Human nature. Everyone gets nervous each time they are evaluated.

Louisa inspects at the license page I presented, then covers her mouth with one hand. Perhaps she wanted to suppress her voice to avoid speaking loudly.

“...Ahem, ahem...”

“Is everything okay?”

“P-Please, there’s no need to worry. But, 280? How did you get such a number? Hey, did you really defeat the demon with a bounty!?”

Her cheeks turn red as she looked my way with her sparkling eyes. She behaved more like a lover rather than being an official of the guild.

“This is way too awesome, Atobe-sama! The highest experience I had back when I was active was 105, and my level rose to 2 after a month of becoming a seeker.”

“Really? Then it was all thanks to defeating that Redface.”

“Well, I think so, too. The experience you receive from a demon with a bounty would be far greater than their regular sub-species. If I am not mistaken, you will need to hunt around 50 watadama to move up from Level 1 to Level 2.”

So in other words, the experience value of the Redface is roughly 50 times greater than that of a watadama? Seems reasonable enough. It even has the ability to annihilate a Level 3 party.

“O-Okay then... Can you please place a piece of evidence or material that you have obtained from the Redface on that platform?”

“Of course, but I brought it as it is and it’s inside this leather knapsack. Is it okay to take it out like this?”

“Yes, it’s fine. I’ve been a guild officer for nearly five years, and I have seen my fair share of demons.”

I jammed my hand inside the bag, reached for the Redface, then put it atop the scale-like platform. It felt gross. Once I get the bounty, I’m definitely purchasing some gloves

to equip.

“It’s this guy... Uwah... Why... What’s wrong, Louisa?”

“So you really defeated it, huh... I have never thought that you were a man of this nature. Sorry, I have underestimated you.”

Louisa was clearly on a daze as she placed her hand over her blushing cheek. It was quite obvious that she was so astonished.

“Uhm... Well... as you can see in the logs, we defeated it, the three of us. Me, the mercenary Theresa, and Kyouka, the lady who has been transported here moments ago.”

“Sorry, although it might be rude of me to say this, but a Level 3 Rogue and a Level 1 Valkyrie would not be able to contribute anything to battle the Radface. Everything was because of the power of Atobe-sama’s odd job and skills! Amazing..... It’s really amazing!”

“...Louisa, I’m just a novice seeker. I could be mistaken as someone with great achievement. Although I’m definitely aiming to...”

It won’t be a bad thing to promote myself. In fact, I should welcome such an opportunity. However, I might come to regret it if I would be subjected to some kind of an ambush recruitment.

“Well... I... I’m sorry, I can’t help but admire you. This is my first time having an exceptional seeker under my guidance. Congratulations! I can’t dispute anything. With an experience of 280 points, this places you at the top of reincarnators who went on a one-time adventure.”

Top? I haven’t heard that for the longest time. It sure has quite a good ring to it, but even so, I have to be aware of my own limitations and it’s not going to help if I grow overconfident. Moreover, it’ll be troubling once the news beaks out, so I need somebody to help me on this matter.

“Ah... Louisa, can I ask you a favor please?”

“Yes. What is it? Should I gather some people to celebrate?”

“I do appreciate that suggestion, but please don’t let this be known to everybody just yet. The Redface is a demon targeted by other parties as well. However, we have just subjugated it. It is an opponent that we supposedly cannot win against, given our current levels.”

Louisa was eager for what I was trying to convey. She undid her green braided hair and listened sternly. She did so while wearing a serious look on her face.

“Yes, you’re right. If Atobe-sama’s real abilities were to be known, it would surely attract people who would want to use you to their advantage. As your officer-in-charge, I prefer you freely explore labyrinths, lest you get tied down by others because of your expertise.”

“Thanks, Louisa, I’m counting on you.”

“No worries. It’s natural to respect the decision of the guys who were able to carry out the hunt. We will not reveal their identities this time, but sooner or later, we will post a memo on the notice boards that the Redface was subjugated.”

And just like that, all concerns seem to have disappeared. It felt like it was a weight off my shoulders. I’m lucky to have the guild’s flexibility regarding this issue.

“Encountering the Redface has made it impossible for other seekers to return unharmed, so a bounty was raised. However, there is not that much it amounts to since it is only a one-star demon. We will hand a reward of twenty gold coins.”

“Twenty gold coins? How much would that be worth?”

“Copper, Silver, Gold; by following the order, silver and gold coins value ten-folds. One gold coin is equivalent to ten silver coins, so twenty gold coins should be equivalent to two-thousand copper coins. By the way, lunch at the eighth district can be bought with three copper coins.”

That instantly earned me around two years’ worth of lunch money and our engagement was just a little to over an hour. I wonder, am I being overcompensated? High-quality arms should be expensive though and I hope that this amount won’t suffice.

“How do you wish to receive your compensation? Shall we transfer it to your account or hand it over to you personally?”

“Can I have a hundred copper coins and the rest for transfer?”

“Certainly. Since you have already brought us sufficient evidence for subjugating the Redface, we will leave it up to Atobe-sama’s decision on what to do with the materials. The guild can purchase, them but it would be way cheaper than bringing it to a dismantler’s shop.”

“Shall I take the materials then? By the way... Once I put those in this knapsack, will it expire if I don’t deliver them to the dismantler’s shop immediately?”

“No, that type of bag should not allow the materials to degrade for at least a day. There are many types of storages such as backpacks. The more efficient the storage, the larger will be its holding capacity and goods retention period.”

My necessities would surely increase as time pass by and I need a better storage to put those in order. If it’s okay for at least a day, then it should be fine to take it to the dismantler’s shop tomorrow before heading out for exploration.

Also, there are two things I still need to ask – Credibility and Ranking of which is promoted through experience earned.

“Louisa, “Credibility” is displayed here but...”

“In the guild, we also evaluate whether or not a seeker has smooth interpersonal relationships and they are recorded as part of the experience. Once you do an exploration, your experience should rise even if you don’t participate in the battle that much.”

Louisa didn’t check the figures well, so she runs through it, only to be astounded once more.

“F... Fifty? How in the world were you able to get this intimate within a very limited time? In addition to that, you can’t increase credibility with mercenaries.” With a riddled expression, she slowly raises her reddened face.

“Oh, you mean that fifty? Is it an indication that credibility has increased?”

“N... No. Credibility cannot be quantified in figures from the outset and the license is evaluated using the current status of the person who belongs to that party. Its evaluation is only presented as an estimate and is carried over to experience. The increase should only amount to five or lesser if it's not for longer periods of time.”

So it wasn't just my imagination that there was an unusual shift in Theresa's behavior. Just as what Leila has explained, our relationship was getting better, but it should normally be impossible.

(While demonstrating my power as a Rearguard, does it improve my relations with the Vanguard and Middleguard...? While I'm supporting everyone, it makes them attracted to me with ridiculous intensity? I-Isn't that shady?)

I'd like to think that only friendship develops when you put men in a party. Trust and affection are not the same, right? No? Probably?

I could never imagine that demon section-chief quickly turns soft with just a little 'Support'. Who could blame me for that?

“Therefore, let me do an immersion with you for once, too. The mystery keeps increasing the more I get to know Atobe-sama.” Louisa smiles as she hoists her monocle.

Well if she accompanies me, I would surely use 'Support Defense' unsparingly to deepen our bond as a party. I shouldn't frequent the use of it though and abuse its accompanying supportive effect.

“Atobe-sama? How did you pull that off? There must be something you are hiding with that delighted face of yours.”

“Oh, nothing, I don't just understand it well yet, so don't worry too much about credibility. Finally, about ranking... and is it possible for me to sleep somewhere pleasant since I'm avoiding the stables and dungeons?

“Yes, certainly, the overall rank of Atobe is 137529 and 1124 in the 8th district. Since the number of seekers in the eighth district is about 3000, you are above half of their rankings. A suite room should be provided at an inn within the eighth district. I will show you to an empty room later.”

(“Suite, I’m imagining of a large hotel room but what would it look like in this world?”)

“Ah... speaking of which... it’s about Kyouka Igarashi who was brought to the healers. Atobe-sama fought with her, right?”

“Yes, although it was only by a mere coincidence...”

“I’m sorry but at the moment she will not receive any experience having fallen to the Redface in battle. She was also rescued. After discharge, she will be staying at a stable to take her rest.”

(Section-chief Igarashi on the stables?)

“Would it be in my business to inform her?”

“Well, I’m sorry, but her officer-in-charge is rather new and still can’t handle well the situation. I have been tasked to continue the job of persuading her.”

It will be difficult to tell a woman with high-pride to sleep in a stable.

Although it is possible to switch with my room, I wish to enjoy my accommodations.

“Atobe-sama, you seem to be worried about her. I understand how you feel.”

–Louisa said while I kept on pondering.

“Oh no... what I’m worried about is this feeling of uneasiness.”

“Well, since there are two beds in a suite and you’re pretty much worried about her recuperation, how about staying together? Atobe is a gentleman, so I think that there would be no issues, right?”

Louisa previously offered me accommodations given that my rank was too low. Why would she not apply that offer to the section-chief? As much as I would want the section chief to make a full recovery, I feel like I do not have that courage to tell her to stay in my suite.

Chapter 11

Wælcyrge

Louisa escorted me towards the entrance of the guild. She was in high spirits from start until the very end. Ever since becoming a guild officer, I was the first to have given her a surprising result and she feels happy about that.

(What will I do about her last proposal? Tensions, it surely is rising.)

For now, it's no use to care that much about what the section chief will do after her discharge. It may already be enough for her to accept the reality that she'll be sleeping in a stable given her rank. Let's leave it at that for now.

I headed to the infirmary, which was a short walk from the guild, then asked reception for the section chief's ward. Her physical condition seemed to have improved so she was moved out from her emergency bed.

A lady nurse who came from the emergency room took my license to confirm my identity. I told her that she was my acquaintance which allowed me a visit.

"She's asleep but she'll be awake soon enough. Take note that she might have suffered some trauma from the battle. So please take it easy on her."

"I understand. Will it be okay to enter the room?"

"Yes, it will be okay. If anything happens, please don't hesitate to call us, the healers."

She's not just a nurse but also a healer, huh? I am curious to see how they perform their skills. All that I know is that I can get healed once I receive damage.

I knocked before I enter her room but there was no response. I opened the door and found a well-lit room where a thin hanging curtain was drawn. There, I found the figure of a section-chief, sleeping over a sheet of unbleached bedding.

"...Pardon the intrusion."

I sat on the wooden chair at the bedside. Her face seemed to be a little paler than her overall complexion, nonetheless, she was sleeping peacefully.

What should I talk about when she wakes up? It's not to hurt her pride but should I reprimand her about what could have happened if she failed to join my party at that time?

“...Nnn...”

Before even settling for a topic to discuss, the section-chief slightly opened her eyes, then checks herself.

“Thank goodness, you seem to be alright now section-chief.”

“.....”

I was worried about her state of consciousness, but she turns her eyes towards me and gave a weak smile.

“To think you'd see the way I look when I wake up... Life in this world is giving me something to worry about.”

“I apologize. But, I'm glad that you're safe. What will happen for the meantime is that...”

“I thought I was dead but I wasn't. “Thunderbolt” might have impaired my movement that's why I received a bit of the attack. However, that hurt so much that I thought that my arm was broken.”

I doubted for a moment whether the healer had actually cured her. Considering that I used “Aid Recovery”, Kyouka might inquire about the procedures that I did that time when she was recovering.

–However, before I could piece up a story...

“...At that time... was it true that Atobe nursed me?” The section chief looks down as if trying to contemplate.

“Oh... Well, uhm... what you’re trying to say is...?”

“During that time, was the red demon defeated? Did it escape? If that unpredictable demon ran away, then it might hurt other people, or it may be Atobe and his companion...”

The usual section chief wouldn’t believe that we defeated the Redface, and much more, she would just laugh it off but something seems off this time.

At first, I thought it was the usual her – the one with a prickly attitude. But now, she was initiating a decent dialogue with me and she seems to care at her choice of words.

“You’re free to laugh at me if my assumption is wrong. But if it wasn’t for you, I may have ended up dead. That much is true.”

“W... Well, I think so...? But I only got lucky. My luck won’t always be like that in every encounter of a formidable enemy.”

“Be a little more confident in yourself and embrace them when you succeed, this is the reason why you never get promoted!”

“...it may be so.”

I think she reverted back to the usual section-chief. –Will it be a burden for me if I enlist her to my party?

But I see expressions from her that I’ve never seen before. The usual section-chief was usually in a foul mood. –Now she looks downcast as if she lost all momentum.

“I’m sorry. One thing I failed to do is get that suitable job and I did not find any of our colleagues. I thought I was capable of doing everything on my own but I was wrong.”

“Well... I do not understand what the other seekers appear to perceive. I think that a seekers strength manifests as their levels get higher regardless of their jobs. I think that I could organize a stronger party, even if I have to party with any job available.”

A bit more of this consoling to the disheartened section-chief and I’ll be able to dispel her melancholy from her previous life. I wonder what the heck I’m doing now, but in a way, this might prove to be an effective idea.

I spoke passionately, even though I was really embarrassed, and I haven't done anything like this in front of the section chief when I worked for the company. Passionate employees are often hard to handle akin to organizational culture.

"W... Well what's wrong? I think a Valkyrie is fine. You're going to be strong in the long-run and the equipment looks cool, isn't it?"

"Hey, what's with being good-natured? It's not like you forgot what I've said to you and what I've done when we met after we reincarnated, isn't it? You can look down at me, laugh at me, and make fun of me. You have all the right, don't you?"

"No, I won't do those things. The section chief did not even try to run away, am I right? I shot the sling, then you cast your magic when the Redface targeted us."

After saying those words, the section chief began to fluster and faced the opposite direction.

"T... That was because it was so annoying. I didn't have the patience being harassed by that rodent. I didn't help you because it was dangerous. I attacked because there was no other choice."

"Yes, you were reckless back there, but that lit the fire in me. I was lucky to defeat it, and I had this boost of confidence, telling me that I could defeat that monster even if I encounter it many times over."

"Do you mean that job that you have chosen is strong?"

"If the conditions are met, then it is possible to demonstrate its capabilities. For that reason, I would like to have at least a party member if possible."

"If it's that strong, wouldn't it be better to recruit capable members?"

"It would be... but I think it's best if member levels are close to each other. I would be grateful if you could take my abilities into consideration."

"Are you telling me you'll be the leader? Are you gathering people?"

"Oh well, the section chief thinks that I don't possess such characteristics. In this

world, I also desire to accomplish goals. And in order to do that, it would be in best interest to assume as the leader.”

(This feels like a meeting with the team leader during a presentation of policies. How will she accept this proposal?)

“Section chief, if you think that I’m incompetent and unreliable, you can turn down and reject my offer but, will you join my party?”

Her expression remained unchanged as she faced the other side of the bed. Is it so hard for this person to swallow her pride for being under a former subordinate?

—My pessimistic outlook was instantly betrayed.

The section chief returns to her profile view and takes a good look at me. I was accustomed to her glares, but this time it was different.

“...Support me then, share me that confidence. I’ll do as what you say, but I’m not that helpless of a person.”

“Well... uhm, does that mean you are willing to accept?”

“Can’t you put a finger on what I am saying? Do you want us to sign a contract?”

“N... No. That’s not the case.”

“You’re now the leader of the section chief. You can stop calling me that.”

“Well then, Igarashi-san, I’d like you to show me some promise for being in my party.

“Ha ha, you don’t have to worry about it. Having me would be productive. There’s nothing else that you could have asked for.”

To be laughing like this – feeling refreshed. I’ve never made this person happy up to this extent.

Well, I don’t intend to be a subordinate forever. While respecting the independent way of selecting skills, I want to be sure that you only take those that I ask for, because if we have the necessary skills, the party will become stronger.

Section chief — Igarashi~san raised her body and sits on top of the bed. It seems that she has finally recovered.

“First of all, I need to do something about my clothes. I’ll definitely stand out.”

“Ha ha ha. That’s true. Shall we go to the Arms Dealer later?”

A sweater, pencil skirt, and boots. No wonder this Valkyrie wielding a spear appeared to be that unbalanced.

“Oh, by the way, you lost rank because you fell in battle.”

Igarashi~san confirms it from her license. Her hand trembles, – Maybe it’s a zero contribution, so that’s a pretty low rank. Well, there should a deduction from the total contribution so it might not be the lowest rank after all.

“2987 out of 3039 people? Then I’ll have to sleep in a stable...”

“Seems like it... but, Igarashi~san, I have but one suggestion. Will you please listen to me without getting agitated?”

“Y... Yes. What the heck? What’s with that serious look on your face?”

I ended up thinking of what to say, so I ended up saying it with as little number of words possible.

“W... Well you could stay at my sleeping quarters and get temporary accommodation. I promise I won’t do anything strange. It’s only until you have obtained a higher rank.”

Igarashi~san listened intently, and moments after that, she answered...

“If it’s a stable, I won’t be able to recover. If your accommodations are better than that, then I guess I’ll have to impose on you.”

“I... I understand. Shall we go then?”

“W... Where are we going?”

“To my room. It’s a suite located at the inn and I think it would be spacious enough.”

“S... Suite? Your rank is that high, Atobe-kun?” Her way of addressing me changed all of a sudden. She’s somewhat gotten softer – and it felt like it had this soothing effect.

The directions to the inn were displayed via the map on the license. Shall we settle there first and have some dinner?

Notes:

Walcyrge is the early Old English name for Valkyrie

Chapter 12

Desideratum

After completing Kyouka's discharge procedures, I granted her request to drop by the garment shop before making our way towards the inn.

She inspected the clothes that were lined up on the racks and placed her selections in a basket.

I thought about shopping, too, but before anything else...

"A change of clothes can still be provided as a subsidy. This type of fashion is quite extreme, even for a modern-day person."

The guild actually distributes cotton shirts, pants, and trousers to novice seekers. They only need to earn for the purchase their own pair of shoes. It's harsh, even a female seeker won't be able to purchase her own desired undies if she won't make money.

A single watadama should yield around five copper coins. Hunting five should be enough to cover the purchase for a change of clothes.

"Large quantities of cotton from watadama are needed to make clothes. It could make you hesitant for a moment knowing that they are materials from the guys we attacked and defeated, but you should try to get used to it already. There is an endless demand for cotton. Strange as it seems, but we can cash it at a fixed price every time."

Seekers and partisans are the lifeblood of this country. The materials obtained from demons are one of those things that enable the trade. Food is not only limited to monster meat and people in town were eating something similar to bread.

"Even if that's the case, I'd feel bad that you're taking care of everything for me. I even got you to loan me some money."

"It's a necessity, ladies become really conscious when they wear the same set of clothes the next day, am I right?"

“When push comes to shove, I won’t be too concerned about those things. It’s only been half a day since we got here...”

–Igarashi-san looks at me as if she’s worried about something.

“Oh... no... I... I don’t stink so don’t worry.”

“T... That’s not it. Please do not take offence where none was even meant.”

“My apologies. I’m not used to interacting with women.”

Truthfully, I interact with Igarashi-san on a daily basis. Saying that I’m not accustomed to women was all but, an excuse.

She was not offended about what I said, but the sigh she exudes was quite deep.

“From now on, you should get used to it a little since we’ll be in a party. Don’t be a guy who is forever stuck in his puberty.”

“Ha ha ha... I’m sorry.”

“You don’t have to apologize every time and besides, I’m not angry. You’ll know when I am.”

Igarashi-san’s expression was soft. She said what she meant instead of giving me an earful.

“If I haven’t been reincarnated, I wouldn’t have the chance to say something like this.”

“Ha ha... That’s true... I mean, I never had the chance talk to you about anything else besides work.”

“Rumors pop out as soon as I carelessly talk to someone else at the company. We were together once during an overtime, right? Back then, I was reprimanded for no particular reason.”

Was there such a thing? No, I was involved, and I knew a certain ‘rumor’ related to that matter.

It was the pace on how Igarashi-san made it to the 'Top'. It was rumored the president personally likes her.

"You should also know about this one Atobe-kun. It was the president who pushed my promotion."

"Oh, is that so?"

"Ah, don't misunderstand. It's not an intimate relationship or anything like that. It was arbitrarily decided since he's had his eye on me and I was just a useful piece. I only came to know about his schemes after being promoted but I guess you guys already knew."

"He's had his eye on you because you are a beauty. Time and again, our president always talked about ladies from when he was younger."

–Even a person in power can even change their partner. It was a common issue in society.

"Did you think of me to be like that?"

"No, I didn't know sorts about Igarashi~san and the president."

"It's not like that. Well, it's okay. Anyway, it's just a misunderstanding. I was unwilling to get a promotion, but the president's emails were so persistent. So much, that I should have resigned back then when it became impossible to dispute."

"...So you got frustrated, and then worked me to the bone?"

I tried to get to the bottom of things but I toned down as soon as I saw a defeated look on Igarashi-san's behavior.

"It's quite an embarrassing story but I had a curfew. It's about coming from the office and negotiating to leave at the regular time because my parent's anger levels are extraordinary."

"Huh? Igarashi~san, are you an ojou-sama?"

“We own landholdings in the countryside, hear what I’m saying. And I’m quite popular back in our place.”

How difficult is it to commute from the countryside to the city every day? I bought a house but the travel time to the company is long, so I rented an apartment that took 15 minutes by bicycle to reach the company. It isn’t wise to have a long commute to work.

“But hell... that overtime job was cruel.”

“I’m sorry, I had no other choice but to go back home and work from there.”

Things like these satisfy the premise of aggravating a grudge against her. If I would have known of her situation sooner, maybe half of it was alleviated.

“And the abuse was amazing, it nearly broke my sanity.”

“My brother often told me about how pushy I am... When I think I can do more, my mouth gets worse. I’m truly sorry, I know it’s not an excuse, but it’s because of my personality.”

How I wish his brother said more, however, she is all but a memory now to her family being reincarnated in this world.

“So, how about your family, Atobe-kun?”

“My parents passed away when I was little. But when you say family, I have my teachers and my colleagues. Can they be family?”

I often feel dispirited when it comes to stories like family to the point that it becomes unbearable and I could not speak. But now that I have been reincarnated, I was unable to conceal it.

“...I’m really sorry, you worked so hard in the company but you couldn’t find even the opportunity to take a promotion exam.”

“Well, I thought that it would be very painful to me, but I’m willing to forget it. Anyway, Igarashi-san is now a member of my party, and our roles are kind of reversed?”

“W... well, if it’s an order within the party... I will follow your instructions.”

Let’s bury the hatchet. I believe it is good enough. It’s not that I loathe her to the point that forgiveness wouldn’t suffice. That won’t be difficult.

“By the way... shopping... Are you okay? Oops, the basket is nearly full...”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I wonder if my funds will be enough...?”

I see. She bought too much without prior hesitation. I can give her assistance. It won’t be free though.

“If it’s not enough, I can withdraw from the bank.”

“Eh... you still have some more? You loaned me fifty copper coins already.”

“I could still afford to spare you some. Will it be enough if I give you a hundred?”

“...T... Thirty copper pieces should be fine. I would have a hard time returning it.”

If we go out exploring as a party and earn, then there would be no problems sharing the yield. 50% can be allocated as party funds and the rest could be shared proportionally or according to contribution. It should give the members some form of a fund for personal necessities.

After locating Igarashi-san at checkout to give the exact amount, I realized that I forgot to buy my own clothes. Moreover, aside from a seeker’s armor, I also have to arrange some things before I go to bed.

Notes:

(Desideratum – something that is needed and; or wanted)

Chapter 13

What Defines a “Rearguard”

Shortly after we purchase our clothes, we proceeded towards town where the middle-ranked seekers in the Eighth-District gathered. The property rented-out to me was an accommodation that rests on a hill up against the slope.

Room 304, Nornil Heights, 8th district. This is my address. The large building comprises of eight rooms for the first two stories, but the third floor was a bit larger. There are no further issues, it seems. The adjacent room was unoccupied and it was not in a corner room facing south ^[1]. I no longer have any appointments, so it's time to take a rest.

A fine old lady shows me around. She resides at the inn and attends to cleaning duties together with the rest of the staff. They say she is the manager of these facilities.

I requested her to wake me up at six-thirty in the morning so that we'll be ready to arrive at the Mercenary guild at around eight o' clock.

“There is only one key for the room so please be very mindful of it. Replacement requires you to pay a fine of 8 silver coins per lost key.”

“Thank you, I'll be careful not to lose it.”

Eight silver coins are equivalent to eight-hundred copper coins. A valuable price to pay. It needs to be kept safe.

“Sorry, Igarashi-san, I don't think we can have two keys.”

“Uhm, do we need to make a key for each of us when we live together?”

“W... Well, it's for convenience. We might be coming back to the room at separate times.”

Never did I hand a spare key to anyone. I'm not talking from experience but it's just

for convenience's sake to have two.

"U... Uhm, let me see... It won't be a bother, right? There's no need to argue when it's impossible to do things separately."

"That's right."

As if she would never argue about it. Honestly, I find it hard to believe the moment you opened your mouth.

"If you'd let me argue, are you up for it?"

"No, don't be absurd. Let's be friendly here."

"W... Well, that should be possible when there are things to talk about. Atobe-kun is surprisingly easy to converse to. I just don't know about being friendly though."

(...Interaction... somehow has really been smooth. Maybe she's gradually opening up because I told her my honest feelings back at the garments shop.)

Although the value of credibility is 10, it does not mean that Igarashi-san has become close all of a sudden. –It only increased by 10.

"We need to have a meal once we secure our luggage. The tavern is going to be up until late, so I assume that there would be more intoxicated high-level seekers and it's going to be difficult if we get involved with them."

"Karma increases, so we should avoid getting involved in any crimes. It's better to be careful."

"That 'Karma' is also convenient, right? Even if you don't call the police, the guild garrison will be there involuntarily."

Perhaps the license detects an increase in Karma. Maybe it holds a mechanism that allows it to be transmitted to the guild. Not all of the information seems to flow to the guild though, but it might just be an ostensible story. Eventually, I might be able to come to know more about this licensing.

When I opened the door to the room, I was surprised to find a living room. The room

continues to a bedroom at the back, and it definitely has two beds.

“Wow, it’s bigger than the hotel we used to go to with my family. How did you raise your rank to be able to have this kind of accommodation, Atobe-kun? Was it because you defeated that red one?”

“Don’t hesitate now, you also fought so Igarashi-san also deserves the right to stay.”

“W... Well, if that’s what you say...”

Igarashi-san shy away while holding her luggage not knowing where to go.

I’m accustomed to these types of rooms. It’s just like being in an overnight official business trip. I thought she was going to fancy it more, but her reactions were unexpected.

“Igarashi-san?”

“Oh!?”

“S... Sorry. Well, there are two luggage compartments in here so you can use this here. We’ll decide on the beds later.”

“Yes, understood. Is it okay if I put this here...? Kyaaaah...!”

Igarashi-san clumsily tripped and slipped from her place. This 25-year old, lady section chief wailed an awfully cute scream. It just shows she had no experience with men.

I can assert that much myself that I’m also a virgin. If a woman who is more nervous than myself can afford to somehow prepare herself, then I think it’s time to...

(...Is this perhaps the turning point of my reincarnated life!?)

“Why are you blushing!? Is there any problem?”

“No... Nothing... let’s just finish the luggage and go. Let’s go. B... Because you’re broke, you don’t even need to bring your wallet. It’s my treat.”

“Can I beat you up!? I’m not trying to be blunt but I’m definitely angry.”

“Please don’t beat me! I’m only human...”

I have to be careful how I treat her here, lest spring will be a distant visit. Yes, I am aware that such developments do not occur so suddenly. I’ll have to brace myself for whatever happens, should I fail to control myself.



Although meals could be taken at the inn, they were expensive. So we opt to take dinner at the tavern located down the slope.

The day came to end and the tavern was gradually filled with the hustle and bustle of seekers who finished their daytime explorations.

“Aside from not knowing what this meat is, the taste is unappealing.”

“Igarashi-san, are you perhaps picky with food?”

“Not that much? This blue cheese is like dried horse-mackerel. It’s not that appetizing. Is this some type of fermented tofu or something?”

(Is she weak to those pungent things? Durian would probably be out of the question. I haven’t eaten that either.)

“I wonder if the seekers who come here share the same rank as Atobe-kun?”

“It seems so. Seekers in the higher-rankings of the eighth-district often change their living quarters too, you know?”

“Well, the Labyrinth country is divided into eight and they let seekers compete amongst themselves. I wonder how would the first district look like when compared to here?”

“Eventually, our rank will go up. If that happens, we might be able to move to another district.”

–And in order to do that, we must enlist party members, raise our levels and acquire

good equipment.

“By the way, Atobe-kun, who was that person who looked like a lizard?”

“She’s Theresa, a lizardfolk. The receptionist was worried because my job was indecipherable to her, so she handed me a ticket. I used that to hire her. I’m planning to enlist her in our party permanently someday.”

“That’s right. She looks capable and it would be reassuring if she stays with us for a long time. I have to raise my level too. There’s no time to be fooling around.”

“I will help you tomorrow. When we head out, I’ll explain a method to defeat the red one. The information regarding the skills of the seeker will be our lifeline, so share to me that information regarding your skills too, I beg you.”

“A method to deal with...? I’m looking forward to it. When that red one came out, I thought that I wouldn’t be able to return to the labyrinth again.”

Anyone would be traumatized if the Redface will spawn and attack so suddenly.

“Budwick’s party was the target of the Redface when you happened to be there, right? Igarashi-san.”

“Well rather than being there, they approached me when they saw me beat a watadama by myself. They were offering me protection in exchange for money. I was about to turn them down but then, the red one came out.”

Selling services to a novice seeker. Just thinking about what Budwick does leaves me nothing but disappointment.

“Igarashi san, you were using a spear but the watadama’s movements were pretty fast. How were you able to defeat it by yourself?”

“It’s because I know how to wield a Naginata (*Japanese halberd*). I chose the closest type of weapon I could get used to, but the red one was so overwhelming and it broke my weapon. Now I have to get a replacement.”

“Tomorrow, shall we buy equipment at the stalls in front of the labyrinth? We need to purchase armor too, not just plain clothes.”

“Oh, you’re right. Protective gears. I spent too much money on clothes that I forgot about it... My weapon is damaged, too.”

“Let’s work hard to stabilize our earnings, alright? We’ll be busy starting tomorrow, onwards.”

–And with that, the dinner-meeting was adjourned. It’s time to head back home and rest.

*“Hey, have you heard? “**Death Sword**” came here at the eighth-district.” (Seeker A)*

*“S... she... the “**White Night Brigade**” but managed to escape that place? (Seeker B)*

“I think she’s found a “rookie” and currently raising it to be usable.” (Seeker A)

At first, I thought that it was unrelated, but when I heard something regarding a ‘Rookie’. I was immediately reminded of the two girls I met earlier.

(If they were Elysha and Suzuna... then “Death Sword” is Elysha?)

“Don’t you think of it as a chance? Bringing a top seeker’s luggage..... to dispatch properly.” (Seeker B)

“Hey don’t talk so openly. We’ll talk about that later.” (Seeker C)

A man with a scar on his cheek, who was probably their party leader, told the other guys to change the subject.

“Atobe-kun, is there something wrong? You look troubled.”

“No, well, just a little. It looks like they were talking about a reincarnated child... It’s okay for now. Let’s talk about it tomorrow.”

“Uhm... Okay, if you say so.”

Bath-houses in Nornil Heights are separated according to gender. The junior seekers probably use the communal baths in town, so it would be much more preferable to take a bath here in the lodgings.

I went to take a bath first but still ended up arriving earlier than Igarashi-san. I was lying down on my bed while thinking about the things I have heard back at the tavern, but my eyelids gradually became heavy.

(I feel so lethargic... I'm really very sleepy... I need to be awake, just for a little bit more...)

I close my eyes and doze off. As my consciousness fell, the door suddenly opened.

“Atobe-kun... the baths in this lodging are amazing! At first, I thought that it was because it’s a different world, but they have things like shampoo and rinse. I wanted to... Oh, my... were you sleeping? Sorry... I’ll keep it down...”

(Good for you... Igarashi-san).

Is what I should have said, but I was too sleepy to say it aloud. She was so overwhelmed with the presence of rinse and shampoo that she even wanted to share it, but I was already at my limit.

“See you tomorrow, Atobe-kun.”

Her gentle voice pushes me to back sleep. It’s been a long time since someone was in the same room where I slept.

–In this poorly-lit bedroom, I kept on sleeping.

My consciousness occasionally surfaced up a little, but I was able to fall asleep again.

“H... hey... Atobe-kun, hey!”

“Nnh? Ah, Igarashi-san, Good morning...” *(Arihito)*

There she stood in her sleepwear when I woke up from the moderate shaking. Its amazing that her beauty remains unchanged, even without her makeup on.

She looks at me while standing on the bedside that was lit by lamplight, taking her time to say something.



I already had trouble positioning my eyes when she was wearing a vertical sweater. However, this time in her sleepwear, my eyes locked on to her chest. Karma might go up, so I diverted my line of sight. – I still wanted to see it, but I just couldn't.

“...Can't sleep? It doesn't feel like your usual pillow?”

“It's not like that... I don't really know... I hope you won't feel dejected, but would you please turn the other way while you're sleeping?”

“Turn the other way? Uhm, Did I keep on turning over while I was sleeping? I wasn't facing anyone when I did?”

“I can't help it. It's not your fault Atobe-kun, but when you face me while sleeping, I feel somewhat uneasy. I can't explain it...”

I don't understand it, but if it makes her uneasy, should I grant her plea? What if I roll over again?

(...Wait, it makes her uneasy when I look at her from behind? Even though I'm sleeping on a separate bed? Is it the manner of positioning 'Vanguards' or 'Rearguards'?)

Impossible, there's no such thing. Well, I suppose that's what she's talking about, however, I also can't explain why she's feeling uneasy.

(Would “Aid Recovery 1” show its usual effect, even while she's sleeping?)

An indication on the license that credibility increased crosses my mind. If I sleep at the back like this and “Aid Recovery 1” continues to be active every 30 seconds... then perhaps the next time she wakes up...?

“Okay, I understand. I absolutely will not turn over so please rest easy.”

“R... Really? Please forgive me for disturbing you like this.”

Igarashi-san bashfully apologized then returned to her bed. The moment she fell asleep, I move out of my bed.

(I will definitely turn over in bed once I return to sleep. Will the Rearguard's skill effect fail to activate if I sleep on the sofa? I would like to consider that. No, there's still no proof

that it's because I used 'Aid Recovery 1' earlier.)

Let's move the bed to another room tomorrow after a good night's rest.

Although I could sleep on the bed, I decided to lie on the sofa. However, I could not find myself to sleep immediately.

◇ ◇ ◇

–And then, morning arrived...

I wake up just before the landlady comes.

“Nnh...”

I was sleeping without anything on me because it was not that cold, but now, I have this blanket on.

(Who placed this? Is Igarashi-san up already?)

Would credibility increase just by being at the rear? What happens if it goes up too much? What is actually happening when we're out of the labyrinth? There are no logs. I can't verify that.

Let's try to sleep again on the bed later. If Igarashi-san wakes me up in the middle of the night, that's the time to move the bed to another room.

Notes:

1. A bad direction for a bedroom in Japanese feng shui is South because this area has a lot of yang energy. You can't get good sleep. Too much yang energy makes you feel irritated, easy to get upset and it influences your wealth and luck.

Chapter 14

Rare Material

I stayed inside the living room for a few moments after Igarashi-san woke up. The bedroom basically turned into her dressing room.

“Atobe-kun, you slept over there but is everything okay?”

“N... Oh, It’s okay. It was heaven compared to sleeping on an office chair.”

I was thrilled to have her converse with me in the middle of her getting dressed. I need to get used to this already — we’re going to be living together. After spending the night with the section chief, we’ll be working together... but because the tenseness of the situation didn’t seem to die down... I felt a little restless.

“I... I’m sorry, Atobe-kun, for having inconvenienced you last night... I said some strange things.”

“No, No, don’t mind it. I’m pretty sure anyone would get nervous if someone decides to sleep with them so suddenly.”

Does ‘Aid Recovery’ work even during bedtime? If so, can my skills auto-activate when others need it? For now, it’s not anything serious, but I’ll take some precautions.

I’d rather prefer that Igarashi-san won’t bother with my sleep in the middle of the night, even if credibility increases as a result. That’s like putting her under some kind of spell.

Igarashi-san came out of the bedroom after putting on a change of clothes. She looked slightly nervous. I got so used to her usual wardrobe, but somehow this get-up gives her a fresh image as she starts to blend with this fantasy world.

“.....”

“Ah... It suits you. I’m impressed to see how naturally it fits.”

“It’s not like I’m wearing it because you asked me to or anything... but if it suits me, then I’ll go with this. But I feel like a town girl instead of a seeker; like an ordinary townsfolk.”

“I think it will be easy to put on some type of armor over it. I also plan to buy some kind of breastplate. Can I afford one though?”

“U... Uhm,... there are only three copper coins left? The budget for armor would be...”

“It’s okay. Just leave it to me for the meantime. Aren’t we a party? Unlike a company’s project team, our revenue can be equally distributed.”

She came from a strict family, so to her, lending and borrowing money is unthinkable. Considering the fact that she’s this type of person is more than enough reason of an assurance for me.

“A loan is still a loan. I won’t indulge myself too much from now on. I would also like to be a self-sufficient seeker with Atobe-kun as my companion. It’s not good to be ‘piggybacking’.”

“Okay, that’s good. Moreover, you shouldn’t be too reliant on your leader, should you?”

“T... Then... you can go ahead and scold me for ‘squandering’. I’d feel better, actually.”

I’d rather be strict on her because she inclines to get all worked up with a little indulgence. But even if she tells me to, I still find no reason to scold her.

“No need for a scolding. A change of clothes is not a waste of money after all.”

“Atobe-kun, have you never been told that you act like an older brother?”

Come to think of it, I was way younger than my seniors back in the company and I was sometimes treated like an older brother. I have only come to realize that just now.



After getting some breakfast, I first dropped by the seeker’s guild to inform Louisa of our business for the day. We then proceeded to the mercenary guild.

“Good morning, Leila-san!”

“Fu fu, you’re early. It’s nice to see a seeker who keeps to his words.”

Just like yesterday, she donned her full-body leather armor. She may look intimidating because of that eyepatch, but she’s friendly. This justifies that we can’t judge a book based on its cover alone.

“I’ll be working with Atobe-kun from this day onwards. My name is Kyouka, please take good care of me.”

“Uhm, as I have thought, you were that newcomer I saw yesterday. I was worried ‘cause you went into the labyrinth by yourself. I am pleased that you have found a companion.”

“Y... Yes, I’ll try my best not to drag him down.”

Igarashi-san’s greetings were cleverly terse; like a corporate person that would initiate an exchange of business cards if she would have had it. Leila, on the other hand, sounded commendatory as well.

“It seems that Kyouka is not a vanguard, Theresa is not either. What will you do? Will you choose another lizardfolk as your vanguard?”

“No, please let me have Theresa since I would like to explore some places. We had excellent teamwork yesterday, too.”

“Okay, let me get her.”

I’ll be using another copper ticket for this one. I bought an additional seven pieces from Louisa a while ago, so I have already reached my purchase limit for the month.

I inquired her about the shortest way of procuring more copper tickets, and it seems that the purchasing restriction should be lifted once I reach a certain number of seeker’s contribution.

When the collective contribution reaches a thousand, the seeker is promoted to ‘★Two-Stars★’. The purchase restriction will be automatically lifted by reaching this

and it will enable me to acquire unlimited copper tickets. Thirty gold coins are needed to purchase one-hundred copper tickets.

In other words, the requirements for Theresa's tenure are: one, earn the needed contribution, and two, prepare the gold needed. So instead of putting yesterday's earnings into the keep, it would be better to strengthen the party, streamline the method to increase contributions, and prepare for the inflow of earnings.

"This Lizardfolk's appearance is similar to that of a movie CG. I like the way she looks."

"Her strength is amazing. She's excellent and we can trust her. It's nice to have you again today, Theresa"

Theresa repeatedly nodded, but her reaction was the same as that of yesterday. — Demi-humans also remember the person whom they met once.

"Theresa seems to have been yearning for you. I think she finds it convenient, so I hope that you could dive together for as long as you would want."

"Yes, I think it will take us longer compared to yesterday."

"Atobe-kun, what should we do for lunch? If we're planning to have our lunch in the labyrinth, then we should have something prepared."

"Food is sold in the stalls in front of the labyrinth. If we don't have the skills to cook outdoors, then we should purchase some."

"Thank you for telling me, Leila-san."

"No worries. In that case, be careful out there."

We parted from Leila then headed for the Demon Dismantler's Shop. Today, Theresa silently followed us from behind. Her short sword has received maintenance and her buckler that was partially damaged by the demon was noticeably repaired.

"Leila-san was a former seeker, wasn't she? She looks really strong."

"I haven't heard about it, but that should probably be the case. Lots of seekers often become partisans after they retire."

“Ah, but you can always go out to explore. I wonder if we’d ever reach that point too.”

“Let’s try to reach where it could lead us. We need not bet our lives. If we minimize risk but still rise up in ranks, then we should be able to lead a comfortable life.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

Some seekers wanted to retire as soon as possible, but Igarashi-san’s morale was still unaffected, even from yesterday’s incident.

(Theresa lost her life in the labyrinth and ascended as a demi-human. It’s too cruel to think that she still continues to live as a slave-mercenary.)

Someday, I’ll return Theresa from her subversion, retire from battle, and live a peaceful life. For that reason, we cannot afford to be stalled on the rankings.



Upon arrival at the Demon Dismantler’s Shop, we found a blonde male, tanning demon’s leather.

“Oh, excuse me... I would like some demon to be dismantled?”

“Welcome! Welcome to Lye Carton’s Dismantling Atelier. I’m the shopkeeper, Lye. My daughter Melissa, is tearing down some large-sized demons over there.”

The girl named Melissa wore an apron over a piece of work-wear and uses a large kitchen knife to dismantle a demon. Her eyes look keen as her craftsmanship.

“You’ve got quite a lot of materials hung in there.”

“Yes, they’re fur and some assorted things that I have dismantled. They’re waiting to be dispatched. We deal with materials here, in this specific site of the shop, making sure that they won’t rot within seven days; else the residents within the vicinity will start to complain.”

So this site has a similar application like that of my leather knapsack? Labyrinth country is more of a medieval city. However, there is magic and sometimes, this could

make you feel like there is an abundance of advanced technology.

Igarashi-san was overwhelmed by the strange atmosphere of the place, but she gradually settled down while she inspected the piece of fur that was hung. There were also things like mink fur. If you can process those materials, you'll be sure to obtain some good garments. There was also this box stuffed with watadama's fur.

"Dear Customers, how should I call you?"

"My name is Arihito... and this is Kyouka-san."

"Oh, what do we have here? That's very romantic of you partying together with your better half. When I was younger, my wife and I would dive into the labyrinth until we were smeared in the demon's entrails and blood. What a sumptuous feast, it was! Oops... the daughter might hear me."

"N... You're wrong, firstly, she's not my wife..."

"Y... You don't have to particularly deny it. I know you're just being polite. It's more embarrassing if you react too much."

Igarashi-san gives me her mature opinion... If it was to spread that she is my wife, it would be harder to explain.

And so, we had Lye Carton. They dismantle demons on a daily basis. They were proficiently grotesque and straightforward, so I felt strange and taken aback. I just laughed it off then flashed a wry smile. Maybe we'd get along if only my skills were at par with their craft.

"...Dismantling, done!"

"Thanks, Melissa. Do this customer's materials next. After that ends, you can take a rest."

"Got it."

Unlike Lye Carton, this girl had the hue of hair close to silver. I think she's around her mid-teens? She returned bloodied but her appearance remained conspicuous — coupled with the lack of facial expressions, looking like a bisque doll.

“Sorry, I’m a child of few words, but even so, it does not hinder my craft of dismantling. You don’t have to worry about it.”

“You’re still young but you’ve got the skill to do that, huh?”

I was worried about her circumstances but I just wanted to finish my business. I took the leather knapsack that housed the bodies of watadama and the Redface. Igarashi-san’s bag also contained a watadama.

Lye inspects the Redface and fixes the position of his glasses. Melissa on the other hand, who was watching from the door, slightly opened her eyes.

“‘Named’ demons contain rare materials. My father can do the dismantling. You can bring the material to the arms dealer later.”

“I’d like to purchase it myself, but I leave that to your discretion. First of all, I’ll take the watadama for two silver coins. We can dismantle and give you the Redface’s materials. We could buy it at eight gold coins and in case that you decide to only dismantle it that would be ten copper coins.”

“‘Named’ materials can be cashed at a high price—if the guild sets a prize, the reward would be great. If you happen to encounter them while exploring, take necessary measures to defeat that strong enemy.”

“Atobe-kun, what are you going to do?”

“I see...”

Shall we have the Redface materials processed? Or cashed? If possible, I would like to strengthen the party’s fighting capabilities as much as I can so that we can defeat a formidable enemy... I’ll choose the former.

“What kind of things can you make from the Redface’s materials?”

“Redface uses a skill called ‘Blaze Drive’, it draws out flames from within its body upon reaching critical health, then flies indiscriminately. If its material is processed, you will be able to harness the power of those flames without restraint.”

(So you use such a dangerous skill when you're on critical health...? Thanks to +10 Support Damage, it'd be defeated before reaching that point.)

"If you take the hair of the Redface and the 'Burning Stone' inside its body, then incorporate it into a weapon, you will be able to use 'Blaze' type skills in lieu of consuming magic power."

"I see... you can switch between non-attributes and flame attributes?"

"You guessed it. If you're lucky enough, you can create one more weapon from the redface. If you could request the dismantling and processing service of the materials as a set, we will refund the surplus materials or charge it to the dismantling/processing fee. We will pay in cash if there would be more surplus than that."

"How about if you make armor from the surplus materials?"

"Binding the hair to a shield will raise the resistance to fire. When it comes to accessories such as scarves, you can obtain a small increase in defense. However, we will exhaust all the materials leaving you only with the meat."

Thanks to a watadama which was substantially larger, we were lucky to be able to request more equipment.

I asked to process Theresa's buckler to get some flameproof specs, create a scarf for Igarashi-san and get my slingshot remodeled.

"Have you decided on what to do, Atobe-kun?"

"Yes... Igarashi-san, would you like to wear a scarf?"

"I wear them, sometimes... Will you make it, perhaps?"

"I'd rather prefer a wider range of armor, but we will also visit the arms dealer. I want the persons in the vanguard to have some fire resistance."

I don't know if we'll be able to meet a demon using flames on our explorations for today, but it would not hurt to equip some resistances. I would like to be prepared and resist any type of attack.

“Well then, we’ll be placing the request here in Lye Cartons Dismantling Atelier. I hope that you can finish the job since we are limited on time.”

While Lye Carton prepares the paperwork, Melissa goes into the back with the redface — a rare material... with eyes more vivid than they were previously.

Next is the arms dealer. It will be in a stall in front of the Labyrinth. Let’s go and visit the merchant Madoka.

Chapter 15

Brand New Equipment

Rival's party are stationed today in front of the stairway leading to the 'Plains of Dawn'.

There was this young girl sending off a male party nearby. She's the gyaru who was on the bus with Suzuna. Today she wore clothes similar to that of a parka and a skirt.

"Good luck to you out there, do your best~"

"Ou! Misaki, I'm going to earn it for you!"

She had this middle-hair perm, dyed in a bright color, and her pretty and adorable form can be likened to that of a magazine model.

"That girl, is she doing something like cormorant fishing? Is she making those men sway to her bidding?"

"That's a crafty way to make a living, isn't it? But it's also risky for a seeker if they don't go out and do exploration because their levels and contributions do not increase."

The young girl named Misaki walked towards us, and then cordially smiled as we gradually found ourselves crossing one another.

"Good thing there are Japanese people here~ I can breathe a sigh of relief. When I arrived in this world, many were complaining about various things. There are even monsters around here~"

She has this habit of extending the end of her sentences. However, that way of speaking makes me drowsy. It's not that I hate it. It's somewhat sweet.

"Oh, you don't have to worry about those people~. I was just curious about what it's like to be in a party, so I tried joining. It was good~ There were even people with a higher level than 2~. Anyway, they won't be expecting me to follow them anymore past this point. I've decided to sit this one out."

“Sit it out? Do you mean you’re out of their party?”

“Yes, that’s what it is. It’s better to have an all-girls party after all.”

“Then you should have done it with your friends in the first place.”

As expected of Igarashi~san. Sharp as ever. Misaki stammered for a moment, then laughed it off –realizing her blunder.

“A ha ha... you’re right. I’m sorry to keep you. Always be careful out there. Ah... Suzu~chan. Wait for me... Take me with you...”

Elysha and Suzuna. It looks like they are heading off to the plains again today. Misaki unexpectedly left while we were still in the middle of our conversation, and the three of them headed towards Labyrinth.

(Hey, hey, even though you just called quits with your previous party earlier, you suddenly wish to go there? You’re pretty energetic.)

I was planning to have a talk with Elysha, but my timing was bad. I may be able to see her in the labyrinth later.

Igarashi~san and Theresa stared at me while I pondered.

“It may be good company to invite her, don’t you think? But it depends on her job.”

“No, not just yet. I get this feeling that she’s more of a troublemaker. I don’t wish to have some needless worries.”

“Hmm... But I heard that men are into high school girls...”

“M... Maybe there are people like that, but I am certainly not one of them.”

I don’t really think that way, so I answered with all honesty. However, I remember and miss the old days when I actually can see a student in school uniform.

“I’m not going to decide on my own, but if the situation calls for it, then I’ll invite her.”

“...Is that so?... then, during that time with me...”

“.....”

“Oops, sorry to keep you waiting. Igarashi~san, it seems that Theresa is getting eager to depart, so let’s go and purchase a weapon.”

“Y... Yes, let’s go.”



Madoka, who was in the stall, came to greet us when she saw us approaching.

“Good morning, onii-san! Ah, you’re the onee-san who took the spear yesterday. I heard that you were injured. I’m just glad that you’re doing okay.”

“Yes, it’s thanks to you and I’m sorry, even though you had to choose it for me, the spear broke.”

“Eh? But that weapon was suitable for demons on the first floor. I’m so sorry. I mean, maybe it’s an inferior good...”

“No, a ‘Named’ demon appeared. The weapons you sell work well on watadama.”

“N... Named demons? I heard that things could go terribly wrong if level 1 seekers encounter them. Thank goodness that both of you are safe.”

Tears built up on Madoka’s eyes. It was unreasonable to get that emotional, but Igarashi~san was ready to cry, too.

I waited for the two of them to calm down. Both turned red and then made embarrassed smiles until they were able to talk.

“Thank you for worrying about me. I’ll be more careful in exploring from this point onwards. Also, I’d like to ask for a new weapon.”

“Sure thing! I belong to a merchant shop that has a head office and two branches in the 8th-District. More than one of those weapons for beginners are available there.”

“What would a better version of the slingshot look like? Ah, never mind, it’s not available here. I’m really glad that I asked for remodeling.”

“I’m sorry but a better slingshot is not available in the 8th-District. However, you can always give materials to a craftsman and ask them for a custom-made one.”

There seems to be a low supply of weapons, and the slingshot that I got may have been the last one. This could project a shortage of weapons to supply the newcomers.

One more thing that concerned me is that I have already deposited my slingshot for remodeling. Never did I realize that I could remodel a stronger weapon. It may be too late for those materials to be salvaged, but I feel like it’s better to reinforce the weapon’s efficiency.

“So first of all, shall we decide on Igarashi~san’s weapon?”

“Yesterday, you gave me a wooden spear, right?”

“Madoka, do you have a better spear? It does not really matter if it’s not exactly a spear. Just a long weapon will do.”

“Let’s see... How about a lance? A javelin? Or a spear that is made from bronze? We have them here. There are also those odd types like the trident. They can be effective against underwater creatures. Of course, you can use it on land as well.”

Igarashi~san scrutinized them in detail and ultimately decided on choosing a lance. However, it seems that the lance was sold with its set item.

“Lances are types of spears used for attacking while carrying a shield. A vanguard uses it.”

“Well, for now, it’s better to use this lance. Atobe~kun, what do you think?”

“Yes, yes. As a man, it shames me knowing that I always get to stay at your rear. However, as the rearguard, it is my obligation to demonstrate my skills.”

“Then lance it is. I’ll just switch to another weapon if we come across a companion who is more suitable to be a vanguard.”

“There also is a sizeable demographic of Mid-guards and Rearguards using javelins. Please let me know if you’ll ever need them.”

There was no other weapon stronger than Theresa’s short-sword since it has already undergone upgrades from the mercenary guild. We’ll purchase a buckler instead.

I purchased a chest-piece that was lightweight for an armor. A bronze breastplate that can be equipped to match Igarashi~san’s physical strength. I also bought a pair of leather greaves since there was a stock that fits her size, thus making her look more stereotypical of a Valkyrie.

Igarashi~san’s equipment totaled 250 copper coins in all, 50 for Theresa. I had no difficulty in choosing equipment since I can equip anything, but I ended up getting something acceptable for my Level 1 physical strength. I bought a pair of leather gloves and a banded armor.

“Fufu... Atobe~kun, you seem to be in high spirits, huh? How about mine?”

“Nnn, that’s fine. You’ll eventually look like a Valkyrie, so let’s put that armor over a leotard.”

“Hah!? Y, you know what? I’m not that stupid. There are a lot of Valkyries, but not that indecent compared to what you are visualizing, Atobe~kun.”

Should I present my vision in detail so that she will understand? Even if she calls it indecent? — being pragmatic will really get me beaten up.

Now, the bronze chestplate emphasized the volume of her chest. Knowing that it’s very difficult to create a woman’s armor could be well understood by looking at its artistic curves.

“Theresa’s lizard costume cannot be changed... is this stuck or something?”

“I think it would be difficult for us to remove that.”

She lost her life in the labyrinth, then ascended to demi-human. Leila previously told me that it would be difficult for a one-star novice seeker to solve her subversion.

“Onii-san, Onee-san, they match you well. I wish for your safety on your explorations

and I will do my best to acquire and sell the best goods possible for you!”

“Thank you! By the way, can we hand you materials for crafting equipment?”

“Yes, we can request a craftsman on behalf of our shop. If you find ores in the labyrinth, please don’t hesitate to bring them over.”

Materials from demons, ores... there are lots of things that you can get from the labyrinth.



The capacity of the leather bag I’m currently using is very limited, so I decided to procure a new one. However, this was quickly settled when we returned to Lye Carton’s shop.

‘Red Buckler’, ‘Red Scarf’ and a slingshot upgraded with the skill known as ‘Blaze Shot’. These were all brought by Melissa in a larger bag when we came to receive it.

“Yo! You’ve entrusted us with some pretty good materials, and that’s why Melissa was in a very good mood. This is the least that we could give you. If ever you come to hunt a number of demons or defeat a ‘Named’, we’ll be more than happy to serve you once more.”

“Oh! Thank you! I really wanted this kind of storage.”

Lye carton was concerned that my knapsack could only hold that much. But with this bag, there will be more than twice the storage capacity.

We could surely bring the demons that we have hunted here later if we manage to finish them off quickly, but it seems like there are other dismantling shops nearby, so we could as well check them out too.

“...it was good. Come again.”

Melissa said in a small voice as she vanished towards the back of the shop. I don’t know if that meant like she had fun dismantling and processing the demon, but I got to see her smile for the first time.

“My daughter Melissa said that she wants to go the labyrinth, but there are rumors that a ‘Named’ demon has appeared in the second level of the ‘Plains of Dawn’. The guild has raised a bounty for it, but it has not yet been defeated. I’m looking forward to bringing Melissa there.”

‘Named’ demons relentlessly attack the first party they encounter. To defeat them, you will need to satisfy various difficult conditions... the basics will be useless.

I took the remodeled slingshot, checked its condition, and thought about what we needed to do to reach the second floor.

Chapter 16

A New Tactical Order

After preparing our equipment and preferred emergency provisions from the plaza, the time has finally come for our second exploration.

“Oh, I just saw you a while ago but you were busy doing a lot of preparations. Ane-san, I’m glad that you have finally decided to join Arihito.”

“Oh, please refrain from addressing me as ane-san. I am still younger than Atobe-kun.”

“Ha ha ha. My bad. Don’t take it literally.”

Things have changed. I remember that she had this ‘complex’ from just hearing those words. It’s because she was younger. I’m four years older than her, so I have to demonstrate what I’m capable of, both as her senior and now, her leader. She won’t clobber me up, but she probably will be mad if I mention that word.

“Tread carefully, you guys. Since it only got three levels, you should reach the depths of the ‘Plains of Dawn’ by noon. And be sure to plan your return as well, the vastness of that place is incredible.”

Rival slowly faded away from our sights as we made it inside the labyrinth. What greeted us was the same brightness as yesterday. — Does time even change inside this labyrinth? Maybe it’s always daytime here.

◆ Party ◆

1: Arihito – * ◆ \$ □ Level 2

2: Kyouka – Valkyrie Level 1

3: Theresa – Rogue Level 3(Mercenary)

“Both of you are my vanguards for today, Igarashi-san, Theresa.”

“Yes, I know. I’m itching to use my new weapon already.”

“.....”

I organized our positions, but for now, I am only limited to setting Theresa as a mercenary. With a voice command, the license changes display.

◆ Tactical Order ◆

- 1: Arihito: Rearguard
- 2: Kyouka: Vanguard
- 3: Theresa: Vanguard

I won't entrust the vanguard role solely to Igarashi-san just yet. A shared target can be easily defeated when they work together. They also got close proximity weapons, so the task becomes easier for them if they collaborate. One defends, while the other engages.

If only I got someone with a job specializing in shield equipment, like those heavy infantries, then I would be able to assign that person as a defensive wall. Physical strength increases as their level rise, and so is the weight of their equipment. Moreover, I have yet to see a person using shield equipment in the 8th district. They don't sell such equipment there and it would seem that it needs an incredible amount of ore to produce them.

“Let's try to move around a bit, and test our new formation against those watadama.”

“Understood. I'm very thankful to have some companions this time.”

She says it so wholeheartedly. Have you been walking worriedly by yourself yesterday? If not for Theresa being there for me, I wouldn't be here either.

We ended up waiting for three minutes before Theresa properly sets up her equipment. Rogues seem to detect enemies at a wider range and she was quick for both of us to even notice.

◆ Demon Encounter ◆

Watadama: Level 1 <Caution> Drop: ???

(Huh? The watadama itself is the drop, isn't it? Is there something else aside from its body?)

“—Here I come!”

Now I can't get any opportunities to shoot because of my vanguards. If they won't give me a space to shoot, then I won't be able to test my slingshot. Would it be better if I do a test shot? Should I execute the preemptive strike?

There are still so many things that I need to try. But first things first, will my skill activate only to a selected party member? Or to all of them who are in front of me?

“Allow me to ‘Support’ you, Igarashi-san”

“.....”

While pointing a gesture towards her, I called the skill before the watadama springs-out, then activated ‘Support Defense 1’.

◆ Activity Log ◆

Arihito's ‘Support Defense 1’ activated → target: Kyouka

The watadama's violent body slam attack gets blocked as it comes in contact with the barrier protecting Igarashi-san. She held onto her shield, but seeing the enemy got blown away, she realized that it was an opportunity and she lunged forward with her spear.

“—Hiyaaa!”

◆ Activity Log ◆

Kyouka attacks ‘Watadama’ <Hit> – Support Damage 10

1 ‘Watadama’ defeated

(So the support skill activates, even without reciting it. Moreover, it really works as long as I am behind them.)

A concealed power helped in defeating the watadama as it got thrown off, proving that the lance's attack has connected along with its supporting damage. It was a strange sight to behold. How would Igarashi-san respond to it though?

“Igarashi-san, that was an incredible thrust. As expected from a former Naginata user... Huh? What's wrong?”

She slowly looks back, revealing a face filled with exuberance. –Damn, she looks so happy.

“You deflected the enemy’s advance and increased the output of my attack? This was all because of your supporting skills, am I right? Atobe-kun...?”

“Y... Yes, my job can support the vanguard and it is different from wizards or monks.”

She speared her lance to the ground then embraced her shield with one hand. Breathing-in, breathing-out, as she rests her naked palm over her cheek.

“Was it perhaps... a pleasant experience?”

“Yeah... it felt so... good.”

(Quite a terrible remark that could've been easily misunderstood... Do you feel the pleasure having been supported? No refreshing feelings like becoming peerless, perhaps?)

These are my support skills that make a war maiden so exhilarated. Maybe that’s why Theresa, too, thinks that I’m a nice person.

“It took me five attacks to defeat that yesterday. But now, Zashu...! And after that, Supaan...!... so graceful.”

“Igarashi-san... you’re saying it like you’re relieving stress from a batting center.”

“No, it’s not at that level anymore. With the way I am now, it feels like I’ll be able to perform on every Sunday morning TV show.”

Honestly, it was my first time to see this shrieking demeanor of hers. I’m glad and it humbled me for using my skills. By the way, Sunday morning programs are those that animate transformations of a squadron or those of a modified human being.

“Hey, Atobe-kun~, let’s do it again! Watadama sells for five copper coins.”

“Gladly. Now, look for the next enemy. Theresa’s enemy detection range is a bit wide so you can move back a little. One thing more, allow me to do some cover fire. Next

time, can I ask you to leave a good empty space for me to shoot? It's only for the first attack."

"Understood, I'm also afraid of you getting hurt if the enemy reaches the backline."

I also want to avoid a case of friendly fire. As a 'Rearguard', I wonder if I can acquire skills that will prevent an offensive allied attack on my frontline's back. — Hurry up and rise to level 3.

Come to think of it, I still have a skill point left. Should I check for level 2 skills? I think that my three current support skills are good enough though, and it is wise to take only the necessary skills, then reserve a skill point.

I started picking up the watadama while thinking, only to notice that something stone-like is poking out of its head.

"This is like a drop item, isn't it?"

"Did we get a treasure? A shining, shimmering and beautiful stone, perhaps?"

The object is a round-shaped, green-colored metallic stone. Is this an ore?

So depending on the demon, ore can appear from its body. Is this a part of the bone or a secret drop? I'm starting to feel like I'm unraveling the secrets of demons.



We encountered more watadama after that when I saw something like a green stone registered on my drops column.

It shows 'Wind Agate' [1]. Watadama moves like the wind. Are they some sort of wind demons with wind attributes?

So you can get ores, even if you don't dig. The ores we can amass will increase if we keep on defeating watadama, but never did I expect, that this is the way to obtain ores from these fields. Watadama are weak demons though so 'wind agate' based equipment may not be worth that much.

"Hnn?"

A floating creature suddenly appeared, along with the watadama. It was larger than the size of a fist.

“Hey, Atobe-kun... is that... is that giant beeee...? Kyaaah!”

“I’ll help you Igarashi-san. After defending, evade sideways, please!”

The floating demon attacks her, and the watadama on Theresa. I threw a prayer then observed, hoping that my move would eventually succeed.

◆ Activity Log ◆

Arihito’s ‘Support Defense 1’ activated → Kyouka

(Alright... both my vanguards should take my support)

Clanging sounds reverberate after the bodies of the enemy got denied by my support defense. Igarashi-san evades sideways as instructed, giving me a moment to shoot ‘Blaze Bullet’.

“Gotcha...!”

◆ Activity Log ◆

Atobe’s ‘Blaze Shot’ activated → ‘Dokuyaribachi’ – <Hit>

‘Dokuyaribachi’^[2] in Burning status

“Ehh.?!”

I don’t know how much damage got registered, but ‘support defense’ impaired the bee’s movement, allowing me to hit it with my aim.

“Hiyaah!”

“——!”

Igarashi-san lunges her spear towards the burning bee while the silent Theresa dispatches the watadama with her short sword.

◆ Activity Log◆

Kyouka attacks 'Dokuyaribachi' – <Hit> – Support Damage 10

Theresa attacks 'Watadama' – <Hit> – Support Damage 10

1 Watadama defeated.

1 Dokuyaribachi defeated.

"My word, that was scary. That's a bee... and if you get stung by that, you could die from the complications of 'Anaphylaxia' [3]."

Will it be dangerous if both of them gets stung by these types of bee? Maybe, but it's the poison that I won't tolerate. Not even once. This demon might be the reason why Louisa came running to me worried, asking me if I got poisoned yesterday.

"Because the bullet from your slingshot hit it, its wings started to melt. The movement slowed down, so I was able to hit it with my spear. Were you able to predict it's movement, Atobe-kun?"

"No, It was just a coincidence, but it was so good to look at."

"Oh, forget that. I'm just glad that you made a weapon that can utilize 'Blaze'."

I was certain that it was impossible to kill that bee, given its agility, without getting poisoned from its attack.

Is this the extent of the usefulness of this weapon in this area? Or is it just because it was made from the redface's material? Well whatever, at least we're in a good start.

"Shall we proceed to the second level now? Be sure to watch out for demons along the way."

"Sure, I don't feel tired at all. I still need to raise my level, so we definitely need to proceed. Let's just be careful with the bees."

We defeated fifteen watadama and six dokuyaribachi on the first floor alone, before arriving at the entrance of the labyrinth's second floor.

My bag no longer had the space to store more watadama. Sure, they are light, but they are bulky. If possible, I would like to only take the lightweight materials along with the

demons that could fetch a high price. Or maybe, it's time to enlist a party member with a dismantling skill.

Notes:

1. **Agate** /'ægət/ is a rock consisting primarily of cryptocrystalline silica, chiefly chalcedony, alternating with micro-granular quartz. It is characterized by its fineness of grain and variety of color. Although agates may be found in various kinds of host rock, they are classically associated with volcanic rocks and can be common in certain metamorphic rocks.
2. **Dokuyaribachi** – (ドクヤリバチ) – Poison Needle Bee/Poisonous Stinger Bee
3. **Anaphylaxis** (an-a-fi-LAK-sis) is a serious, life-threatening allergic reaction. The most common anaphylactic reactions are to foods, insect stings, medications.

Chapter 17

The Plains of Dawn – 2nd Floor

Based from the information we got from a party who were hunting watadama at the first floor, the entrance to the second floor was not readily accessible, but we can reach it by traversing the plains and pass between a space where a couple of large trees grew.

Normally, when we talk about labyrinths, their floors change when we ascend or descend a flight of stairs. That norm doesn't seem to apply here.

We've just arrived at our objective — a couple of large trees. Mist envelops the space between them. –This seems to be the gate where we can access the next level.

“What do you say we take a meal before proceeding to the second floor? I also think it's nice to have a snack in between meals, rather than spending a long time eating until we're full.”

“That's right. Let's have a light snack before proceeding.”

The food shops sold dehydrated food since they hold a longer shelf life. As recommended by the shopkeeper, seekers should buy something like an all-in-one nutrition supplement combining a variety of nuts and dried fruit, baked with wheat or something powdery like flour. –Similar to a cracker or biscuit.

It was rather rigid, so the seekers usually pour soup from a water canteen, dipping it to soften and thus, making it ready to eat. There should be other ways of eating it as well, but for the meantime, unwrapping then; nibbling on it will do. The one we got is not that hard to bite, and the inside is a little moist. There should be no problems with chewing it.

“...Wow, my throat feels parched. I think it is best to be aware of the remaining water that we have rather than the food that we brought in this labyrinth.”

“We can't drink the spring water just as it is and we still have a long labyrinth ahead

of us. Using magic, we can push forward then go back from where we came from. We can escape whenever we want, then return to the same spot. We can do that, but the problem is..."

"People with those kinds of skill will surely be popular and it will really be difficult for us to find one."

Theresa's got an amazing appetite and I let her choose her favorite food from the shop. It was jerky. I was also advised to buy her a mix of dried fruits and assorted nuts. Consuming jerky alone might lead to an unbalanced nutrition.

"...Hmm..."

(She doesn't utter anything at all, even when she's eating so spectacularly... No, maybe she's only swallowing her food.)

"...There's a reason as to why Theresa remains as a mercenary, right? She also doesn't even speak a single word..."

"Demi-humans cannot communicate in our words, but I don't want her to always remain this way. I think that if I can get her out of that lizard equipment..."

"So, that's why you want her to be a regular party member?"

"Well, that's part of it too. I explored with her yesterday and she's very reliable."

I would've been annihilated by the Redface if not for Theresa.

There is "Rearguard" if there is a "Vanguard". My capabilities as a rearguard will become more apparent when I use my support skills and I must maintain a good relationship with my companions at all times.

"We did hunt for about an hour now, aren't you tired, Igarashi-san?"

"No, not at all. Whenever you're at the rear, my body feels warm and my fatigue somewhat dissipates. Is this because of your skill, Atobe-kun?"

"Uhm, yes. Well... uhm, aside from getting tired, don't you feel anything strange?"

I'll take this moment to investigate their condition and what's actually happening. I am well aware that 'Support Attack' and 'Support Defense' can somehow ameliorate their feelings. Also, I would like to identify what kind of emotional state 'Credibility' increases whenever I activate those support skills.

Igarashi-san, who took a bite from her mobile ration, didn't give an immediate reply, she just blushed, then continued on chewing instead.

"Hnn? Sorry? My mouth was full."

"My bad. Where were my manners? Please take your time eating."

"Did I even feel strange?... How should I describe it? It's more like... I'm being 'Protected'?"

"I see... if that's how you feel? Then it's positive."

There's no mistake in how you felt because it really 'protects' you from the rear. It seems like there is no increase in her affection towards me either. – There is none.

"...These mobile rations are so plain. Next time, should I prepare a bento instead? I was told that the kitchen back at our accommodations can be used. I can whip us something."

"Oh, that would be splendid. I didn't know you can cook, Igarashi-san?"

About half of the ladies in our section brought their bento because they can't buy when everybody just wants to eat. The employees' cafeteria becomes overcrowded, so it leaves them no other choice but to bring their own bento.

I brought handmade bento myself and I saw lots of female employees eating their lunch at the meeting space many times over.

"...Well, my mother made a lot of things for me."

"She's a good mother. But will the flavor of Igarashi-san's bento live up to her mother's?"

"Well... if the ingredients are available. Shall we stop by the market after we finish our

explorations for today?”

“Okay, let’s do that... Theresa, are you full now?”

Theresa’s throat made an audible gulp. She seems to have consumed her piece of jerky.

She stares at me. However, she would have nodded if she was already at her fill.

“Between the piece of jerky and the one that Igarashi-san is eating, which do you prefer?”

“.....”

Theresa points at the meat, then shifts her fingers on the solid bar of food. I felt her emotion run across that gesture and that really made me very happy.

“You prefer meat, don’t you?”

She nods in return. Why did you hold back? Was it because I was chewing on a bar of this mobile ration? Were you thinking of saving the meat for later?

Upon receiving the jerky, Theresa nibbled a little mouthful of it. Silently chewing, while staring at me.

“Are you happy, Theresa?”

“.....”

“W... well I guess you love to eat jerky.”

There are no other problems with these mobile rations since they gather in the stomach, and gives the necessary nutrition. The overall disadvantage with them is that that they are somewhat tough to chew. –That’s why it would be lovely to have some bento, just like what Igarashi-san has previously suggested.



Upon entering the second floor, there was a noticeable increase in the number trees. The plains evolved to something like a savanna? –Sorry, I am not that familiar with the

definition of a savanna.

“Which way should we go? I wonder which way we should go to reach the third level, too.”

“There seems to be another gate like this in the northwest direction.”

We’re lucky to get some bits of information from Rival. We should’ve been exhausted trying to figure out our directions the entire day. Add another day to that if we really ran out of luck.

(I, myself, don’t have the means to cure my fatigue, but both of you in front me, seem to be always at full stamina... Anyway, there are no signs indicating that their health is being reduced due to fatigue.)

“By the way, Atobe-kun, I’m still at level 1, but I have two skills. Should I tell you something about those?”

“I saw it yesterday. ‘Blink Step’ and ‘Thunderbolt’, right?”

“Yes, those skills. You can tell if I’m using them, Atobe-kun?”

“There’s a page in the license containing ‘Activity Log’, it gets displayed there.”

I turn the license page. Slid my fingers several times to look at the screen that I want.

◆ Activity Log ◆

Arihito is talking to Kyouka

Theresa invokes ‘Enemy Detection Expansion 1’

(It displays the casual behavior as well? Is it possible for Theresa’s skill to remain active, even without consuming magical power?)

“Oh, I guess you’re right. It says here... Atobe-kun’s ‘Aid Recovery 1’ has been activated. It’s thanks to this that my body feels nice and warm.”

“Sorry, it’s a skill that continuously activates. You might not be able to maintain your calm, so I’ll find some ways to deactivate it.”

“I was attacked by that red demon yesterday, and it was very painful. I felt relieved afterwards...”

“Y... Yes, I used this exact skill. It’s our strength and magical power –A skill that can recover your health and stamina.”

I remembered using this skill while in a specific posture –like embracing her from behind. Anyway, it was just necessary to fix my position to her rear, so it can’t be helped.

Even at a five-meter radius, ‘Aid Recovery’ remains active. There should be an effective range. But by how much? It needs to be gauged so we can maintain a workable distance, especially when fighting an enemy.

–At that moment, just from a little distance away, I heard the voices of a party in battle.

Theresa reacts, just barely picking up enemies from her detection range. Clearly in the distance was Elysha and Suzuna.

(Misaki is not with them...? God, what are they up against...? What type of being is that...? A pig... a wild boar?)

“ROOOOAR!!”

“Kyaaah!!”

“Suzuna, stay down! Don’t you ever move from your spot!”

◆ Demon Encounter ◆

Fanged Orc: Level 2 : <In Battle> : Drop:???

Dokuyaribachi: Level 1 : <Caution> : Drop: ???

Dokuyaribachi: Level 1 : <Caution> : Drop:???

(An orc. A level 2 demon. But hearing those rumors about Elysha, this is just an opponent that is clearly outclassed.)

Her golden hair drifted along the wind. This lady swordsman, donned in silver armor, was a little bit shorter than me, but she stood up against the orc and raised her voice while beating it up without remorse.

“-Die!!!”

That’s quite a radical expression. She’s probably gone through a lot of battles and it manifests just on how careful she is.

◆ Activity Log ◆

Elysha’s ‘Slash Ripper’ activated → ‘Fanged Orc’ : <Hit>
1 ‘Fanged Orc’ defeated

Elysha looks at the sword on her hand, and moments after that, the orc was already lying, spewing blood on the ground. A moment to scream was not even spared for the orc from the moment of contact.

(The stronger enemy has been defeated... but still...!)

“Igarashi-san, Theresa, let’s divert the attention of the bees towards us!”

“Understood!”

“.....”

◆ Activity Log ◆

Theresa invokes “Accel Dash”

With her skill, Theresa accelerated and enters the range of one bee. The other bee, however, secured a dangerous attacking position.

No matter how good a swordsman is, if the bee becomes aggressive and positions itself randomly in the battlefield, Suzuna, her rearguard, will be placed in a vulnerable position.

“Arihito-san!”

Suzuna, who laid low and motionless, noticed our arrival. She then raised her voice. Before the whirling bee in the air attempted to aim at her, I released a blazing bullet from my sling.

Notes:

'Increase Attack' will now be renamed to 'Support Attack'. I already made revisions from the previous chapters (specifically Chapters 3, 7, 8) with this term. I deeply apologize for this error.

Chapter 18

Provisional Party

“-Hit it!”

◆ Activity Log ◆

Arihito's 'Blaze Shot' activated → 'Dokuyaribachi' – <Hit>
'Dokuyaribachi' in Burning Status

“-Tch!”

The distance was too far. The damage was weak. I can't stop that bee unless it takes another attack.

“.....!”

The bee over Theresa's left side became aggressive, but it was immediately intercepted with her short sword.

◆ Activity Log ◆

Arihito's 'Support Defense 1' activated → Theresa
Dokuyaribachi attacks Theresa : <Miss>
Theresa attacks Dokuyaribachi : <Hit> – Support Damage 10
1 Dokuyaribachi defeated

'Support Defense' is constantly negating those poison needles, so we won't need to worry much about getting poisoned. The last surviving bee that has been burning in mid-air situated near Theresa's right flank began its attack.

“Tch...!”

(This is the glaring weakness of a swordsman... Their attacks can't reach enemies who are high in mid-air. If that's the case, then...!)

“Igarashi-san!”

“Understood! Take this!”

I’m not the only one who can do ranged attacks. Valkyries too can draw swords and wield magic.

◆ Activity Log ◆

Kyouka’s ‘Thunderbolt’ activated → ‘Dokuyaribachi’ – <Hit>

1 ‘Dokuyaribachi’ defeated

Igarashi-san’s skill struck the already weakened burning bee. Sparks flew as it fell to the ground, missing its chance to fire its toxic needle towards Suzuna.

(We managed to pull it off... Definitely not for solos... This is too much...)

Elysha sheathed her sword and ran towards Suzuna. She remained clueless about who was at fault and for a short moment, she was unable to speak.

Igarashi-san and Theresa can wait. I need to extend some help to Suzuna so she can compose herself.

“Are you okay? Were you injured?”

“I’m fine. Thank you... But I think I’ve been dragging you down.”

“No... That’s not true. You’ve accompanied me this far, Suzuna. You’ve worked so hard to even take down watadama by yourself.”

Rival previously mentioned that if there was a large gap between levels, the acquisition of experience value would drop. ‘Lesser experience acquisition’ was mentioned, but it’s safe to assume that it’s not a zero value.

Hence, there is only one way to speed up Suzuna’s acquisition of experience.

“I see... Your party is disbanded. Elysha lures the enemy, and it is up to Suzuna to deal the final blow.”

“Y... yes. There were a lot of seekers hunting watadama, so it was difficult for us to find prey.”

"I... I don't have that much time to spend here. I have to rush Suzuna to level 8 and return..."

"You're going back...? Correct me if I'm wrong, but are you going back to the 'White Night Brigade'?"

Elysha looks back at me with leering eyes... How did I know? –I heard it... But I won't be mentioning details of it.

"...I will not return to that brigade. They abandoned my companions. My best friend is waiting at the depths of that labyrinth. If I leave her alone, she will become a demi-human with no emotions."

"Do you think that demons take seekers as captives? Can't we just ask the guild or other parties for help?"

"You'll learn about it soon enough. While you live as a seeker, you'll be doing your everything to survive by yourself. There's nothing wrong about it... Nobody even wants to die exploring. Some only continue to explore because they want the privileges given to the famed and renowned."

Suzuna has not heard about her circumstances yet, but this time, she listened with a calm expression.

She was so scared when the bee aimed for her, but she just wouldn't want to show it to Elysha. Her will to hunt and search for something in the labyrinth lit noticeably in her eyes.

"Sorry, I saw a large demon pig a while ago, but my feet petrified. I should have assisted in using my bow."

Speaking of shrine maidens... I don't know why, but this shrine maiden carries demon-warding arrow charms which she actually uses with a bow. She also wore a red skirt over white clothes, and her long black hair was bound with a ribbon. A Japanese-style shrine maiden though her clothing is of a different world.

"By the way, I saw you enter the labyrinth a while ago, but what happened to the other one?"

After my question, the expressions of the two turned dim. Troublesome things have happened, apparently.

“She failed to open the treasure chest and...”

“That girl... Misaki seems to have chosen a job called ‘Gambler’. She opened the box that a demon dropped, claiming that she had this extraordinary luck, but she suddenly disappeared.”

“Treasure chest...? We’ve hunted demons ourselves, but nothing appeared. Is there such a thing?”

Just as what Igarashi-san had mentioned, we found item drops, but we did not find anything resembling a treasure chest.

“The frequency of treasure chests appearing in a floor is quite limited, although strong monsters tend to drop them. There are times that even if you have to defeat one-hundred demons like watadama or dokuyaribachi, they just wouldn’t appear. I think that Misaki’s luck is good, but... If only I could have told her that a maybe it was booby-trapped and a job like a thief can only remove traps...”

Elysha seems to have an abundant experience as a seeker, but it appears that she’s having a difficult time leading beginner seekers that well.

“Where will she transfer if she got caught up in a trap?”

“It’s an ‘Area Teleport’ trap, so she’s somewhere within this floor. We have to find her quickly so that we can regroup.”

“Yes, that’s right... Are we going to look after these kids, Atobe-kun?”

“I wish we could do that, but... Elysha, are there any other parties on this floor? I would like to ask for their help.”

It will take quite a time if we go back and ask assistance from Rival. In times like these, even if her contribution decreases, I wish that Misaki was holding on to a ‘Scroll of Return’.

If a demon attacks her and she fails to escape, she'll meet her end. For now, it's up to her skills as a level 1 'Gambler'. Watadama attacks can be quite fierce for a level 1 seeker. We can only pray for her safety and hope that she never encounters a Fanged Orc.

"...This could be my imagination, but as soon as I came here, I felt like someone has been watching me. The other party must have been barely keeping up to observe."

"Huh? Is there someone monitoring people coming to the second floor? Such a thing... for what purpose...?"

As Igarashi-san aired her doubts while I recounted the events in the tavern during yesterday's dinner.

Those three men. They knew that Elysha is in the eighth-district and they seem to be up to no good.

"...I think it will be difficult to convince the other parties' to cooperate with us. It's also difficult dealing with a group of demons just by ourselves. Let's just have a provisional party, for now, Elysha."

She's level 8. Compared to her, we are seekers who are simply out of heaven's reach.

She was desperately trying to raise a rearguard because the group that she was previously in abandoned her most important friend. She's trying to organize a new party in order to help that friend of hers.

They still have a long way to go. If Suzuna comes to know more of Elysha's circumstances, it's unlikely that she will leave her party. However, the risk of receiving a counter-attack from Elysha's blindside will never rescind as long as she continues on using demons as bait.

"We can't say that just yet, and Suzuna will be prone to counter-attacks if you force to gain experience from the poisonous bees. Their poison needles, even watadama can still be considered as a threat. So if possible, Suzuna should cooperate with people of the same level."

"What...!? Are you telling me that I'm not qualified to work with Suzuna! Is that it?"

“It’s not like that. What I am trying to say is that we would like to align ourselves towards your objectives, but as much as possible, please let Suzuna increase her experience with us. Elysha, we will have you accompany our party in solo for the meantime until our levels match. You’ll be able to party with us by then.”

“I... I understand. In order to help my best friend and no matter what my circumstances are, I just can’t ignore a person offering his goodwill. Moreover, I am also worried about Suzuna, who was reincarnated just recently.”

“My goodness... both of you...”

Tears gathered on Suzuna’s eyes, prompting her to suppress her emotions and cover them with her gloves. Elysha seems to be at a loss for words, so she looks to my face, once more.

“I really had this hunch that you were a capable rearguard, but I sure neglected it. *If we could just cooperate with you, then I may be able to safely increase Suzuna’s level.* That’s what I have been thinking and I’ve completely ignored that possibility.”

“I do not wish to attract that much attention because of my job, so I am asking you as a companion to please keep it a secret. Are there any problems with you right now as a vanguard? Anything else excluding the shortcomings of defending the rearguard?”

“If I don’t have a party, then there won’t be any problems. I can move from a safer distance. If I tell you to escape, leave. That’s all I’m asking. Suzuna, I gave you a “Scroll of Return”, be sure to use it.”

Elysha extended her right hand towards me after expressing herself. I gave her a handshake, and then she reciprocated with a smile on her face.

“I’m looking forward to working with you, Arihito-san. Oh, it takes time to remove my gloves, so please excuse my rudeness.”

“I’m looking forward to working with you as well.”

“You can count on me as your strength. Rest assured, I’ll reward you generously for cooperating with me. I’ll follow your instructions and give it everything I’ve got, even if I’m not in your party. If you lack living expenses, please tell me as well.”

“For now, it’s okay. And I wouldn’t want myself to be branded as a gigolo.”

Elysha heartily laughs. This might be her most natural expression yet. I was worried that she wouldn’t be able to maintain a good mental state when worrying so much. She’s tough but appears to be on edge at all times. –I’m glad I met you here with Suzuna.

Elysha shakes her hands with Igarashi-san and Theresa as well.

–Suzuna timidly came in front of me.

“A... Arihito-san, please take good care of me. Once again, my name is Shiromiya, Suzuna. I look forward to working with you...”

“Atobe, Arihito. This is Igarashi, Kyouka-san. Here is Theresa, the lizardfolk.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. I am delighted that the number of my companions have increased.”

“.....”

When Igarashi-san smiled, Suzuna smiles back as if she was relieved from all of her worries. Theresa’s handshake was a little bit powerful, so it would take a little time getting used to, but nevertheless, Suzuna shook her hands and greeted her dutifully.

◆ Party ◆

1: Arihito: * ◆ \$ □ – Level 2

2: Kyouka : Valkyrie – Level 1

3: Suzuna : Shrine Maiden – Level 1

4: Theresa : Rogue – Level 3(Mercenary)

Guest 1: Elysha

Chapter 19

Tyrant

Even if the number of my companions increase, I will follow them from behind. –will I get spend the rest of my life at the backs of these girls from today onwards?

This formation permits the use of defensive support, but I could not bring myself to make Igarashi-san and Theresa receive attacks from those burly Fanged Orcs. Although they may be small fries for Elysha, I also could not convey myself and ask her cooperation for a damage test either. The large gap of defensive power that Elysha has, when compared to the rest of the members, eliminates her as a test reference.

(I can't set Elysha's position if she is enlisted as a 'Guest'. She may be skilled, but there is always a risk. I would also like to 'Support' her.)

How much health should a level 8 swordsman have? If it's eighty, then five points of recovery are enough, right? Although 'Recovery' doesn't give much of a guarantee during a battle crisis, it would always be useful if she rests for eight minutes, enough for a full recovery.

"There's no escape if a Fanged Orc notices you... So I'll be the one to mop them up."

Elysha decided that she will stay in front to defeat the fanged orcs. I do understand well that she is doing this for Misaki, but this leaves a bad taste somehow.

(Huh...? Shouldn't the experience value supposed to be zero?)

In the party information, aside from health and magical power which were under the member's name, yellow circles and black circles were also displayed. This part seems to be the experience value and it increases gradually as the seeker defeats an enemy. There are a total of ten black circles and each gradually fills up with a yellow color to indicate that the seeker accumulated some experience.

For convenience sake, we will call these balls representing the experience value as 'Bubble'. Even for Elysha, who was enlisted as a 'Guest', gained about a tenth of one

bubble from defeating an enemy. It's just a little portion of the experience, but the lower level members gained a much larger amount of experience. Theresa receives a little too. Mercenaries gain experience, so I think that it will eventually increase.

"Arihito-san, orc fangs fetch a high price. Can I hand it over to you? We can gather more, but I shall only cut high-quality fangs. I'll hand to you whatever I'll redeem as well. You're party leader after all."

"Sure, leave those under my custody... Is what I wanted to say... but I'm already overburdened and..."

"What is the market value of these high-quality orc fangs?"

Igarashi-san was dead on without going around the bush like I did. Elysha replied after a short pause.

"It's about three silver coins in the 8th-district. Although it can't be used as a material in the upper districts, everyone still gathers them. They fetch a good price in this district."

"That is enticing... Would you allow me to pack as much as I could? It's not that bulky."

Ten high-quality orc fangs will be three gold coins. If it goes smoothly like this, it won't be long until we could start saving up for the purchase of those mercenary tickets.

"Elysha, after finding Misaki... No... Will you stay with us again for tomorrow?"

"W... Well... If you help her, we can manage a fresh start?"

She's in a hurry, and it looks like she's trying to suppress her emotions, knowing that it will take a longer time to raise Suzuna.

I'd really want you to find Misaki sooner, but if she's moving around, she's less likely to be found, especially if she covered quite a distance.

-But, we heard her instead.

"Noooooooo~ ...! H... Help me~, help me~! Somebody~ Please~!"

I just can't imagine how a piercing scream can be done with such a carefree tone.

"H... hey...!? Misaki-chan...?!"

Suzuna immediately knew that those screams were from Misaki, but from the direction in which she heard the voice, came this enormous shadow that left her aghast.

"W... What is that?"

At first, I couldn't recognize it, but then, I became certain. What I saw is the shadow of a giant; its physique was enough for us to look upwards.

".....An Orc...? Damn, it's huge... and it's got companions, too...!"

Finally, we located the position of Misaki, but she was bound, deprived of her freedom, and prepared like a sacrifice or for the huge orc. She was there, lain on the grass.

"My word, that kind of..... appears in the second floor of this beginner's labyrinth?"

"...A 'Named'...There shouldn't be a seeker who's daring enough to reveal himself to a named. Someone who knows I can defeat it incited this...!"

(-So that's what they were talking about!)

A top seeker is going to bring your luggage. The men whom I've overheard at the tavern were talking about these.

If Misaki was not there, it would have been Suzuna. They'll have Elysha defeat that 'Named' that they made to appear. Maybe they will let her defeat a demon that their levels can't match, and then deprive her of the yield.

-Perhaps they are also planning to neutralize her with some method of sorts after she defeats it. So right now, they are hiding while observing the situation somewhere in this labyrinth.

"You guys stay there! If I am alone with that named orc, then...!"

"Elysha, wait!"

A group of Fanged Orcs is now ready to take down Misaki who is unable to move. I absolutely have no time to think on any means of saving her right now, but I instantly knew that we have to defeat them.

“–You orcs! I’ll scatter your giblets!”

◆ Activity Log ◆

Elysha invokes ‘Sonic Raid’

Elysha’s ‘Blade Rondo’ activated → (6)‘Fanged Orc’ – <Hit>

6 ‘Fanged Orcs’ defeated

‘Sonic Raid’ might be a faster and a more powerful type of temporary acceleration skill compared to ‘Accel Dash’, and its distance covered is much farther.

Elysha instantly approached the orcs. She unsheathes her sword then her blade fluttered and danced. It’s a skill more powerful than ‘Slash Ripper’ and it can be used for enemies in closed formations. In her words, she shredded orc bodies into tiny bits.

–But she was smeared with blood. The air around her began to fill with an ominous intent.

◆ Activity Log ◆

Elysha’s ‘Berserk’ triggered

“AAAAAAAAA!!!”

I heard Elysha’s suffering with that scream.

That’s going to be a problem. Blood probably triggered a unique skill.





“Elysha-san...!”

“Atobe-kun, we cannot leave her alone like that. She may be strong, but that’s one gigantic orc.”

“—Stay away!”

Suzuna, Igarashi-san, No one can stop her right now, but herself.

Berserk –If we relate it to a Berserker, then the current Elysha should now be in frenzy. Her attack power rises, but she may not be able to distinguish anyone from her surroundings.

(That’s why you didn’t organize a party, telling us to put up our distance!)

She’s carrying the burden alone. Both the ‘Named’ orc and the group of orcs; she’s claiming them as her sole responsibility.

–There is a possibility of Misaki getting involved, even if she’s far away. It’s too late to stop Elysha now because of the distance she made with ‘Sonic Raid’.

“I will definitely save you... I... I am not a murderer... NOT A MURDERER!”

The advance party of orcs was decimated while the remaining orcs hesitated. The named orc, however, stood firm in its place.

Elysha cuts into the front of its enormous body, while the ground began to shake as soon as it came closer.

I ran a quick glance at my license and shouted, but it was already too late.

“ELYSHA, THAT GUY IS...!”

◆ Demon Encounter ◆

★Juggernaut: Level 5 – <In Battle>: [Immune to Physical] – Drop:???

“–YAAAAAAAAAAA!!!”

Elysha screams as she jumps on the huge, mountain-like orc.

She attacks with her sword, but she left no graze on its skin. It slid silly on the surface, and she was swatted away.

“.....!”

‘Named’ orc. –This Juggernaut’s roar was completely on a different level than that of a Fanged Orc. It was too loud and violent.

“ROOOOOAR!”

◆ Activity Log ◆

★Juggernaut’s “Brutal Voice” activated → Elysha [Temporary Paralysis]

★Juggernaut captures Elysha

“Tch... Release me... AAAAAH...”

It was a frantic charge. Elysha, who was peerless against fanged orcs, got caught by the huge orc. She continued to scream.

The orcs on the ground began to gather as they prepare to march towards Misaki.

–If she didn’t open the treasure box. –If she only acted carefully, then we should not have been in this kind of a horrible situation.

Igarashi-san, Theresa, Suzuna — I’m too scared to die.

“...ARIHITO..... RUN AWAY!..... ACK... ACK...!”

Those juggernaut hands can crush and mangle a person’s body. Elysha will be crushed to death if this continues.

We can use the scroll of return that was entrusted to Suzuna. We were told to escape. We can do that now if we want to. We never stood a chance against this demon in the first place. —But Elysha and Misaki will die if we run away.

My thoughts caused my blood to boil. Unforgivable! That is not going to happen.

“ESCAPE... I’M TELLING YOU... RUN AWAY!!!”

◆ Activity Log ◆

Arihito’s ‘Blaze Shot’ activated → ★Juggernaut <Hit>

★Juggernaut in Burning Status.

“ROOOOOAR!”

I aimed blaze shot towards the Juggernaut’s face. The flames might do some damage, even if it is immune to physical attacks. –And just as expected, the huge figure that didn’t even flinch from Elysha’s sword has been shaken, and all of the strength from its hands were lost.

◆ Activity Log ◆

★Juggernaut attacks → Elysha : <Miss>

Elysha, having been released, maneuvered herself before reaching the ground. It gave her a chance to evade the Juggernaut’s attack from above.

The strength of this ‘Named’ cannot be gauged in figures, even if it is at level 5. I hate to admit it, but Elysha, who is at level 8, is being driven to a life-threatening situation.

“Igarashi-san, Theresa, Suzuna. If all hope seems lost, leave me and escape.”

“I can’t do that! I’ll be with you till the end!”

“Please, listen to what I am saying, I will do anything if I manage to return safely. I promise you.”

“I will not run, even if we are to lose. So, please... Let me stay.”

“Suzuna-chan...”

Even I felt terrified of being in front of such a demon. –On the other hand, Suzuna stayed courageous, even at this dire moment.

“...Suzuna, use the scroll of return if needed! Promise me that!”

We can fight this juggernaut, but approaching carelessly will give us our end. — Elysha can still evade the attacks. We can still create an opportunity to counter.

(Support defense won't likely work on these kinds of large opponents... but if it's the support for an attack, then maybe...)

“ELYSHA! JOIN MY PARTY!”

Elysha shows no reaction, even by calling her out. She avoids the attack of the Juggernaut once more, looking for the opportunity to counter. — Is this the effect of Berserk? Or is it now with your own volition?

–No, she's provoking it so that Misaki will stay safe.

“WE CAN'T SAVE MISAKI IF YOU GO ON LIKE THAT! LISTEN TO ME, PLEASE!”

I shouted at the top of my lungs, but she still doesn't look back. –There's also a limit to how long you can keep on evading those attacks.

“Elysha-san... Please! Listen to what Arihito-san is saying!”

“Hey... Do you want to die in such a place?”

Suzuna and Igarashi-san shouted. But still, their voices were unable to reach. –It was at that moment that I really gave up.

◆ Party ◆

- 1: Arihito: * ◆ \$ □ – Level 2
- 2: Kyouka: Valkyrie – Level 1
- 3: Suzuna: Shrine Maiden – Level 1
- 4: Elysha: Cursed Blade – Level 8
- 5: Theresa: Rogue – Level 3(Mercenary)

(Huh!?... She entered the party... if that's the case then...!)

My support skills can now be used on Elysha. It will be effective as long as it's a distance that the Blaze Shot can reach...!

“SUPPORT!... Elysha, use multiple attacks!”

Physical attacks are invalid, but if the damage can be fixed at 10-points, then there should be a possibility!

“Huff... Huff...”

Elysha invokes ‘Sonic Raid’ with her remaining magical power. Her visage disappears, while the Juggernaut of a far greater size punches nothing but air.

— A torrent of slashes pours all over the Juggernaut’s body.

◆ Activity Log ◆

Elysha’s ‘Blossom Blade’ activated → ★Juggernaut <Hit>

★Juggernaut 1<Hit> No Damage + Support Damage 10

★Juggernaut 2<Hit> No damage + Support Damage 10

★Juggernaut 3<Hit> No damage + Support Damage 10

Ultra High-speed successive blows after her ‘Sonic Raid’ were executed. It was beautiful. It was majestic yet had this fierce power.

‘Support Attack 1’ provided a concealed attack power to a companion who was unable to damage an enemy. Is there a distinction between a physical-attribute and a non-attribute attack? — I have no choice but to gamble on this attack, either way.

(Please work... I’m begging you...!)

◆ Activity Log ◆

...

★Juggernaut 15<Hit> No damage + Support Damage 10

★Juggernaut 16<Hit> No damage + Support Damage 10

1 ★Juggernaut defeated

The giant sways then stop moving, collapses, and flattens the fleeing orcs caught in its fall.

“Huff... Huff...”

Elysha, who appeared in front of the fallen Juggernaut stabs her sword on the ground

and collapses, but I have never forgotten that they were yet to come out.

“Theresa, Igarashi-san. Cover Elysha! It’s not over yet!

It was Theresa who was quicker than anyone to notice. Three men appeared from a short distance away. They each have a shooting weapon pointed towards Elysha.

“Crap! Just pretend you didn’t see anything! You won’t regret it... SPROUT!”

These men are mocking us. They may have thought that the Juggernaut was defeated only with Elysha’s ability. However, once they figure this out, they’ll surely come to regret.

The levels you have maybe higher, but I absolutely won’t lose!

“Everyone... ‘SUPPORT’...!”

“ON IT!”

The men shot their weapons, but their small bow projectiles get blocked by the shields of Theresa and Igarashi-san. Her Thunderbolt and my Blaze Shot followed soon after, hitting two of the men.

“Guuh...!”

“Gouh...!”

“DAMN IT!”

Igarashi-san pushed forward to thrust her spear, but the two men who tried to sustain it were overwhelmed by the supportive attack, leaving them incapacitated. Fixed damage 10 shocked them with a single attack, making me conclude that they were at most level 2.

There’s one remaining. –The man who looked like a boss and appeared to be complacent.

“DAMN IT...! Useless bastards...!”

Theresa, who was closing in on the boss using ‘Accel Dash’, draws a slashing attack. He

evades the attack and attempts to withdraw, so I hurriedly fixed my aim to stop him before he flees.

“-Take this!”

◆ Activity Log ◆

Arihito attacks ‘Bergen’ – <Hit>

“Gaah...!”

I missed my chance to properly aim the sling, but it seems that it hit him pretty bad. Bergen collapses on the spot. My sling is not very powerful, so is that a critical hit? It seems that the iron bullet hit his jaw when I approached to confirm.

Igarashi-san looked at me, but her words wouldn’t come out. Surviving this in itself is a miracle. –Rather than rejoicing, I felt enfeebled, like my soul was being pulled out from my body.

I looked at my back. Suzuna was watching us. She may not have joined us in battle yet, but she’s going to, in due time. I just nodded and urged her to go and join Misaki and Elysha.

◆ Activity Log ◆

Arihito’s ‘Aid Recovery 1’ activated → Elysha’s health is recovering.

At 30 seconds, the first tick of recovery will take effect. I thought it took longer. Maybe my senses got sharpened too much? It felt like the time moved so slowly.

“Igarashi-san, Theresa, I’m safe and sound. I’m sorry for worrying you.”

“Geez, Atobe-kun, really... don’t scare me like that...!”

“.....”

Relieved to see each other safe, we began walking. On towards Elysha, who was in front of the Juggernaut that she personally defeated.

◆ Activity Log ◆

Elysha’s ‘Berserk’ is canceled by the end of the battle.

Notes:

Credits to anirhapsodist for colorizing the illustration.

Chapter 20

Magic Gems and A Black Box

Elysha's health decreased by around 70%. I recall her telling me how invaluable potions are, yet she stood there unmoving like the sword she stabbed on the ground. It's either she got no potions with her, or it's possible that she lacked the energy to use one.

"Elysha! Are you okay?"

"....."

She broke her balance like a thread that snapped when I called her out. So I quickly rushed at her back making sure to support her; no longer minding what our appearance would look like.

Her voice has returned to its calmer tone. Her loathsome tongue and incessant urge to kill seems to have dissipated with the release of Berserk.

"...you surely have the abilities of a level 8. But, it appears that there has been a bit of an incompatibility for a swordsman towards that guy."

"Named" demons seldom exhibit certain tolerances. It was said that the named demons appearing in this labyrinth does not have them, but what we encountered here surely contradicts that information."

There is no seeker brave enough to confront that Named orc. I came to understand that from our previous battle because the demon is overpowered when compared to the actual difficulty of this labyrinth.

Once again, the supportive restoration successfully activated upon Elysha, whom I have been supporting. Her strength gradually returned.

"I have felt it for some time now... My pains have been receding since Arihito became my rearguard."

Because of this mysterious power, she may grow anxious while recovering, so I have to explain this to some extent.

“I have the skill to recover the vanguard’s physical strength when I position myself as the rearguard. You will recuperate soon enough, so please rest. Potions are precious after all.”

“...There is a huge demand for potions in the upper districts and the supply can’t keep up. A person who can make potions will more likely sell them in the upper districts via the merchant association rather than here in the 8th-district.”

So in other words, the reincarnators who have chosen “Pharmacist” as their job can live comfortably so long as the materials for making potions could be gathered.

However, I think that every job has a demand and they each have their own purpose. We also can’t get the desired job if we do not have the aptitude for it. Everyone is making a fuss in selecting their jobs saying that there is no fairness, but I don’t think that there’s a problem with that.

“...by the way, Misaki... Thank goodness, she’s safe.”

“...That girl, her bad luck seems to be way off the charts. I wasn’t even confident if I could protect her... but, thank goodness...”

Elysha doesn’t blame Misaki for doing such a reckless thing, and by the look at those lush eyes, I can tell she’s rather pleased from receiving help.

“Misaki-chan, please wait... We’ll untie you soon enough.”

“Theresa, cut the rope with your sword.”

“.....”

After receiving Igarashi-san’s instructions, Theresa cuts the rope with her sword. Misaki fainted from the appearance of the Juggernaut she saw at a very close distance, and as the ropes were cut from her hands and feet, they left obviously painful red marks.

“Shouldn’t Karma increase if you restrain other seekers in this manner? Were they trying to get the yields from the Juggernaut, even if it meant they become criminals?”

“There’s a loophole and they use it to circumvent the licenses’ Karma detection. Misaki was either blackmailed, or something important was taken away from her; making her follow whatever they said. There are several ways, but the easiest thing to do is to make Misaki attack deliberately. If you get restrained from your own retaliation, Karma will be canceled.”

(“So there’s such a thing?... It’s just like those fraudulent schemes.”)

“However, that only concerns the information on the license. If you are to report what they have done to the guild, a trial can be given.”

“...place them in trial and have Misaki testify. Wouldn’t that be fair enough? Will there be problems for that because we too engaged them in battle?”

“It looks like they were the ones who shot first, so there’s no problem. Fighting is of course prohibited amongst seekers. It’s apparent the Juggernaut’s yields provoked them to do those stupid things.”

The Redface’s materials and its bounty are worth a fortune especially for the seekers in the 8th-district. Should the Juggernaut’s materials prove as significant as that of the redface’s, and it’s bounty awards us equally magnificent, I just can’t imagine how much it would be.

Now, how can we bring back the materials of the Juggernaut with such a very large body?

“How are these huge demons handled?”

“There are people known as ‘Couriers’. They specialize in carrying large demons, and they work in and out of the different districts. Before handing it to them though, be sure to harvest the precious magic gems. It’s also best if you can equip a ‘Gem bag’ with you since cutting off different organs may be dangerous..... now check the horns and claws... the fangs...”

“Sorry, I don’t know how to do it, can you come with me? Are you able to walk?”

Elysha's strength has gradually recovered, but she's still tottering. The battered places from her body seem to have been cured thanks to the recovery of physical strength. — Her arms that got swollen from her crumbled glove, and crushed ribs where parts of her armor broke off has been recovering.

"...Can you lend me a shoulder then?"

"Oh, sure. With a demon of a size like this, it'll be a pain to inspect..."

The couriers would likely ask for an incentive or commission for carrying the crushed fanged orcs aside from fees that they charge. There are dozens of fanged orcs, so there should be a sizable amount of the materials that could be gathered here.

"Hmnn? I... is this a treasure chest?"

A black box fell from the gigantic Juggernaut's flank. It was smaller than I have imagined, but the size would still fit inside the loot bag.

"From what I have heard, the chances of a treasure chest dropping from a 'Named' is quite high but their spawning rates are rare. It's my first time witnessing a treasure chest sourced from a named demon. For seekers, it's a treasure worth craving for. It's better to ask someone who can open it and disable any traps applied to it. You can request it from the shops back in town, but you'll have to inform the guild first."

"Oh, Then I will do that."

"Atobe-kun, do you need our help?"

"Sure, please check out the claws from its left hand. There could be some magic stones in there."

Igarashi-san and Theresa volunteered, so might as well ask them to check. I was a bit anxious about the guys whom we defeated, but they were showing no signs of movement.

(Should I ask for Rival's assistance in taking them to the guild?... It could surprisingly be a great task for them.)

"Ngh..."

“W... What’s wrong?”

While lending my shoulder as we walked, Elysha lets out a small voice. It was awfully sexy-like, so I got reflexively shaken.

She looked at me and her cheeks turned a bit redder. Well, I wonder, has she grown conscious as we started walking and our bodies bumped ever so closer? If that’s the case, I can distance myself to her but that also means I couldn’t help her much.

“...It’s nothing.”

“Okay... Look... There’s a horn protruding from its forehead. Unlike the fanged orcs, its horns have sprouted...”

“The horns severed from orcs occasionally have magic stones in them. But since the horns themselves do not possess that much strength as a material, they have no value — they’re like nut shells that we discard.”

The watadama’s ‘Wind Agate’ was stuck to its forehead, while the Juggernauts drop items are found in its horns? Since I didn’t know that, I could have lost it already, so I must thank Elysha for that.



Several horns grew from the Juggernauts forehead and from two of the ten horns, we found ‘Alkaid’s^[1] Crystal’ and a ‘Life Jewel’.

There are times when a Named drops life jewels and if you process them along with an accessory, the maximum value of health will increase. ‘Alkaid’s Crystal’ on the other hand seems to be new for Elysha and she did not have any details regarding it.

“Can I really have this, Elysha?”

“As I have told you before, I will give you the yield. When the time comes that you have processed something that only I can use, the let me buy from you.”

“Okay then. If you say so.”

Can 'Alkaid's Crystal' be embedded to a weapon, protective gear or accessory, just like the Burning Stone? — It would be better to bring this Lye Carton so he could tell me if it will be useful or not.

"And by the way, get a courier after you exit. There is a liaison at the plaza, in front of the labyrinth."

"If I go outside and leave these, wouldn't it be taken by other seekers?"

"The license records the one who defeated the demon, so other people cannot touch them. Dropped items and treasure chests are exemptions though, so you need to take those with you."

(I see... there's still a lot that I need to learn.)

The man named Bergen was aiming for the treasure chest, a drop item that wouldn't incriminate someone if stolen. This time, I am pleased to learn sorts of matters concerning the adjudication of Karma for licenses.

If you are knowledgeable of the rules, you can take measures against bad guys trying to circumvent that loophole. You should always be watchful, even in town. There will always be a possibility that a person with malicious intents can end up using Karma cancellation by means of 'Retaliation'.

"No, this world can be dangerously unpredictable. So again, I feel the need to protect my party members."

"Things like kidnapping or abduction are not easily doable, but it's best to be careful. I hope that Misaki would be more cautious and discreet about this next time."

Because Misaki was still unconscious, I carried her. Aside from Aid Recovery, is there any other support skill that is capable of treating fainted members? — Is it not allowed to have those?

"...Hngh..... Please... I going to be raped by orcs..."

"Ouch! It hurts! Her fake nails are digging in like claws!"

She seems to be having a terrible dream as she dug her fake nails on my shoulder. As

soon as Suzuna began to carefully stroke her shoulders, she became a little calmer.

“...Zzz..... Zzz...”

A shrine-maiden has the skill ‘Cleanse’ that improves the mental focus of party members. I think that it would be compatible to use on Elysha. However, if Elysha as “Cursed Blade” goes berserk, Suzuna’s ‘Cleanse’ may not be enough to suppress it.

If possible, I would like to know more about her job. There is no way that she could have written that job. — If I would have to guess, she may have changed it.

Meanwhile, I have to fetch the couriers to take the yields. I’m curious about the value of contribution I got from battle.

For the record, we defeated a total of 15 watadama, 8 dokuyaribachi, 23 fanged orcs and a Juggernaut. Increase in everyone’s level, credibility, and others was displayed in the summary. There was no doubt that the figures cannot be compared with the former.

Notes:

1. Alkaid (Eta Ursae Majoris) is a prominent star in the handle of the Big Dipper, an asterism which forms just a small part of the overall constellation of Ursa Major.

Chapter 21

Return

On our way towards the 1st-floor entrance, we found a party on the verge of being defeated by fluffs and bees, so we rescued them.

Elysha's physical recovery was almost complete; however, it's still too early for her to engage in battle, so all the members gave a hand. For the first time, I got to witness Suzuna while she uses her bow. I frequent the use of a sling myself, and there seems to be a better chance that I may also get better accuracy as long as I am to equip it.

"When my arrows hit, I get this strange feeling..."

"Keep in mind that there's always an attack bonus when you're in front of me."

"Oh, is that so? That's amazing Arihito-san... you already grasp how your skills work in this world."

"That's because you guys are here. I couldn't figure it out if I worked alone."

It's not that I'm being humble, but I must never forget. I am only a rearguard. I am only capable when kept in formation.

The lad who seems to lead the party we rescued, was a little younger and it looks to me that he's taken the job of a swordsman.

"Thank you... Those guys suddenly appeared from our flanks."

"Were you routed despite being in formation? That's quite serious."

"Wow, a beautiful onee-san... Wait, this party is... An all-ladies party?!"

"It's a harem... Is this your first time to see this in real life?"

(Coming to this different world is real. It's a strange feeling, but nevertheless, it's real.)

This young party of boys was quite vocal about their thoughts. I never used the word 'Harem' even in my previous life, so it's embarrassingly awkward when I said it. It's a good thing that the ladies weren't paying attention.

Igarashi-san seems to be the type of an older sister being yearned for by younger boys. She is younger than me, and if I were a high school student, then maybe I would make similar reactions like them.

"H... Hey! Ain't that Misaki?! What the heck? We were worried about you!"

That's right. — I immediately noticed it when I saw their faces. These guys were the four-man party Misaki sent off earlier.

I thought that the pretty-boy leader would give an awkward reaction when he saw Misaki bolting out from my back and saying "Thank you!" in a clear voice. It also looks like she has been conscious for a while now.

"A ha ha... I felt like I should be going with you after all, but then~, I got caught in some sort of a trap. It was a disaster, but you see~, these people came to my rescue."

"My god, that was dangerous. Without life, there is nothing, don't waste your life, so you should be more careful."

"What if you let us help you? Seriously, that bee is super dangerous ya know? Get hit, and you be poisoned."

"I was really in trouble~. But I will also be in a lot of trouble if I go on like this, so I'll try my best to get stronger on my own. I think it will be useless if I leave it to Junpei and the others."

"Misaki... hey, how 'bout coming along with us...?"

It seems like the name of the young party leader was Junpei. But Misaki just shook her head.

"It seems that my job only depends on luck. I only amount to that much.~ Junpei probably needs a monk or someone who can use magic. You know, I am also trying to find out what I really am, what I will be, and where will I belong."

“...I see. That’s regrettable, and we’re muscle brains anyway, so...”

“So that you won’t be easily defeated like before, how about getting a thief? You won’t be flanked that easily if you can invite a vigilant guard, right?”

These guys will work hard, so as not to show Misaki their pathetic side. –They called off the conversation then resumed on hunting watadama.

“They’re good people. They’re important to you, right? The number of parties out there are as numerous as the stars. Have you decided where to go?”

“That’s right. Even though you only got to join them for a while, they seem to be happy.”

“Oh, please don’t say that. I’d rather stick with you. I have been thinking for a while now, you know? Yes, I can work them like bees as their queen, but I have already reflected on that. I really need to get stronger, so I wouldn’t be targeted by crooks.”

“Misaki-chan... then from now on... with us...?”

“Uhm... about that, I guess that it would be quite difficult. Erm... Who are you by the way?”

“Oh, I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Arihito.”

Apparently, the job called Gambler possesses skills that can raise the drop rate of treasure boxes. We would surely benefit from it, but somehow, I get this feeling that she wouldn’t be going along with us.

“I may have fainted, yet for some reason, I can tell you’re an outrageous party. If you are somewhat hesitant just like me and think that my decision might be too soon; the thing about how careless I was, I’m already reflecting on that.”

“I also do not want to conquer labyrinths stoically. I want to raise rank and I don’t plan to stay in the 8th-district forever.”

“It would be amazing to get out of the 8th-district, but experience points seem to go down if you don’t earn anything in a day. That’s the reason why most people who are left in the 8th district are stuck at levels 1 and 2. There are around 3000 seekers in the

8th-district, right?”

— That would be right if you ask me. We can defeat an enemy if I get to use my ‘Rearguard’ skills, and I did not think that it was that difficult to raise our ranks and earn for a living.

If you happen to come across a ‘Named’, you have no choice but to retreat, especially if the party has insufficient strength -- In numerous occasions, parties come to think twice. The world will change if they can be defeated that easily, and it is natural to flee if you know you can’t win.

“If the party leader is ranked first in the 8th-district, there is an examination to be taken in order to proceed to the 7th-district. However, many ignore that opportunity because they can always choose to settle in the 8th-district...”

Elysha’s words were substantial and relevant. I’m guessing she already has seen these sorts of people.

“I will try my very best as well. Oh, But I want you to put me in your party tomorrow, even if it’s just for once~... or am I just a big burden?~”

“No, not at all... By the way, when Misaki was caught by the treasure trap, what happened to the box?”

“Oh, I put it inside a bag and gave it to those scary ojii-sans.”

So we ought to retrieve it. Although I could say that it would be difficult for everyone to go back, Elysha just shrugged her shoulders and took off using ‘Sonic Raid’ like it was just an errand. I’m sorry for letting you use the skill of a higher ranked seeker for such a thing.



When I tried to report to Rival-san about Bergen and his group, they just entered the labyrinth in high spirits. It would be inexcusable if I bother them.

Bergen’s group can hide their presence. That skill of theirs have caused various problems and gained notoriety. Up until now, evidence was hard to come by. This time was different though as we were able to grab hold of some useful clues.

Rival's group disappeared from our sights as they descended the stairs. Igarashi-san conversed to me soon after.

"Rivals group, are they are doing something like protecting the order of these vicinities? Although it's imposing to call them as private police, it somehow gives me the feeling that they are."

"That's right. I think that many are saved thanks to them."

Although they're in the beginner's labyrinth, they seem to find fulfillment when they safeguard the development of their juniors — To see them this lively gives me that sort of impression.

I wonder if I could make it to the top of the rankings. We gained more experience and attained a higher level compared to what we've had previously at the first level of the labyrinth. Moreover, it looks to me that there's still a long way to go before I can truly explore the labyrinth of the highest difficulty in the 1st-district.

"Elysha, the seekers in the 5th district, are they around level 8?"

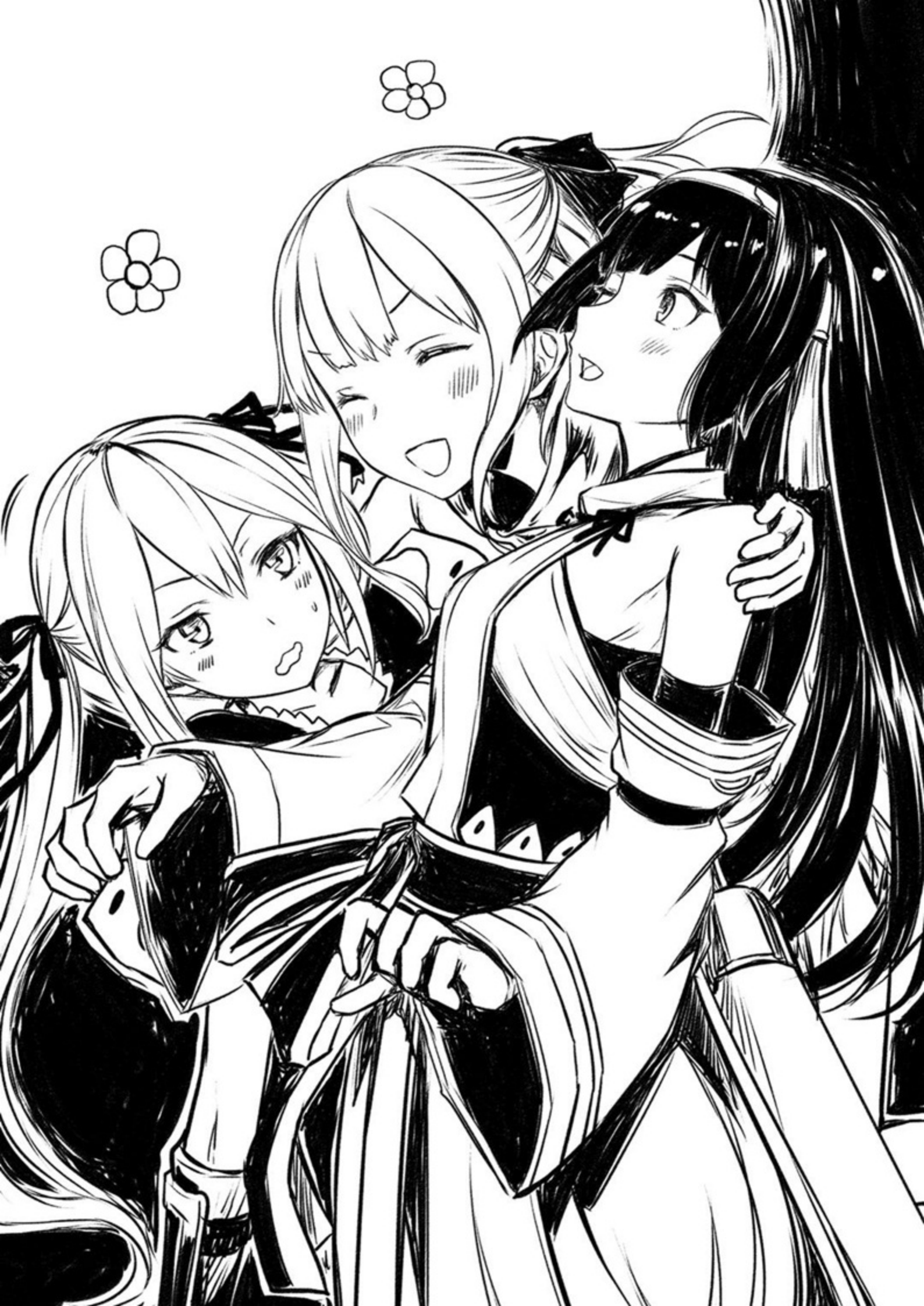
"No, think they're about level 10. My level is rather low for some reasons."

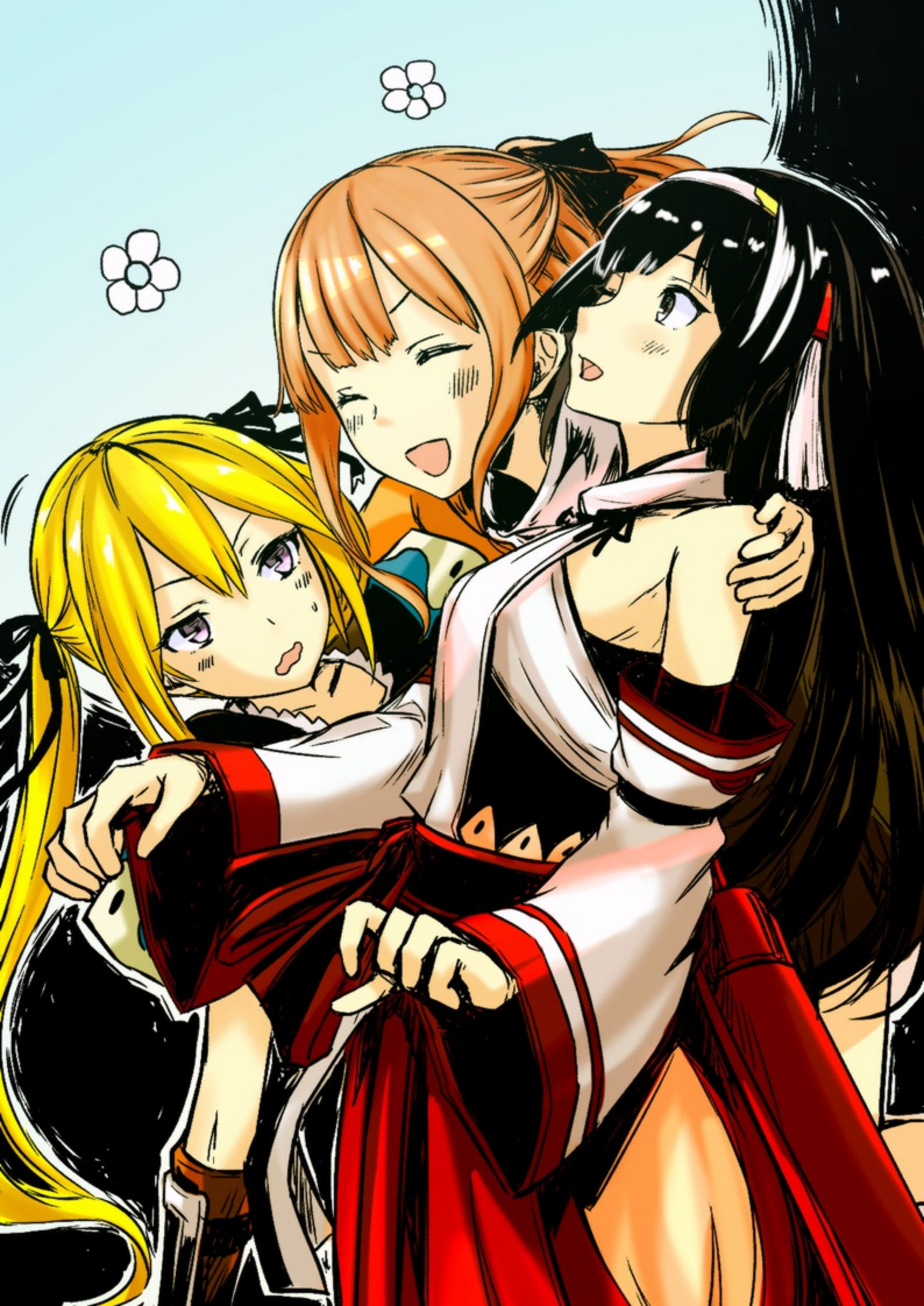
It's not just me, but the rest of the party looked at Elysha. Igarashi-san and Suzuna, both of them were watching her with lively concern.

"...I'll talk later. Well, when I see you like that, I think that you'll feel dreadful if I wouldn't say anything. I'm sorry for keeping it from you, Suzuna."

"No, I also want to know more of you Elysha, even if it's just a little. Ever since we've met, I have sensed that you were tormenting yourself over something."

It's just the second day that these girls have met, but it looks like they're already in a good relationship and I can already see them as friends. Misaki then tugged her arms around the back shoulders of Elysha and Suzuna. Was she holding the same thoughts as well?





“Kyaah... W... What are you...?”

“Somehow being intimate with Suzu-chan more than me~, you’re making me jealous. Me and Suzu-chan have known each other since we were kids~.”

“Even if Misaki invited Suzuna, she’s going to come with me”

“No, once every year, we have the habit to go skiing together... she didn’t have to invite me.”

Suzuna amended it, maybe it’s because of the accident, and probably because of their reincarnation. Since neither got invited, it doesn’t mean that their circumstances are involved. –That is what I understood.

“...Labyrinths among other things~, I don’t find meaning in exploring them. However, I will change the way I think and I’ll give it my all. So please~ ... don’t misjudge me.”

“I think that’s a good vision, you go tread that direction. Atobe-kun, shall we directly report to the guild and have a meal? Let’s visit the market some other time.”

“I understand. Theresa, Let me send you to the mercenary guild.”

Theresa –didn’t nod. Is this a reaction of her will?

“Atobe kun, why don’t you ask Leila-san on how long we can bring along Theresa-san?”

“Wow, I was thinking about it a while ago, but this lizard hat is so cute~. Wow~, it’s smooth and chilly.”

Misaki repeatedly touched Theresa’s Lizard hat. — Or rather, she touched the lizard’s full face.

Even though her mouth is peeking through, it seems that she is delicately embarrassed while Misaki examined her.

When she described her nice and chilly, I got curious on what the sensation was. But since it might be sexual harassment if a man like me touches them, I have to stay prudent.

When we returned to the Guild, but Louisa had already felt a premonition. I felt so nervous when I came to greet her.

“Elysha-san and Suzuna-san also accompanied me today. Igarashi-san contributed great efforts, too.”

“Thank you. However, we were just following Atobe-kun’s party.”

“I also... couldn’t do anything, I merely spectated. But, I’ll work harder next time.”

Louisa-san beckons me while assessing our lineup. Then, she whispered so only the both of us can hear.

“At first, you were alone, but now, it seems that there are five new members... You curiously invited women only. What is Atobe-sama’s intention?”

“N... No, it’s not like that. That young lady... Misaki has only been rescued. She will probably separate from us and do something else. She has the freedom to do so.”

“The other four people will continue to work together, right? Because Elysha is level 8, and soon Atobe-sama will move out from the 8th-district...”

“Will it be possible to ask Louisa-san to remain as my officer-in-charge? But if the district changes, it is impossible after all.....”

“N-No, because individual guilds can transit to all the districts... Atobe-sama, if it would be fine for you, then I could be in charge of you for a long time.”

“Then that’s good. I got used to it already and it would be lonely if my officer-in-charge changes... right?”

I felt something nudge my arms. When I looked back, it was Elysha.

“Arihito, it is the leader’s job to report the results. We also need a change of clothes, so we need to get back to the inn at once.”

“Oh, I understand. Then just leave it to me.”

“Kyouka is going to accompany Theresa at the inn, so please rest easy. Let’s meet at the tavern near your accommodations later.”

We can take mercenaries until 8:00 in the evening, so we still have time. If we leave at 7:30 in the evening, then we can make it back to the mercenary guild.

After parting with everyone, Louisa-san asked a question.

“Oh, by the way, did you perhaps encounter a ‘Named’ today...?”

“Yes, we defeated the Juggernaut fellow on the 2nd-level and I’ve entrusted the recovery to the couriers. They will report to the guild later after their task is finished... L-Louisa-san?!”

“.....”

To Louisa, who even got surprised with the Redface, the ‘Juggernaut’ word was too much and excessive.

In this hallway, I supported her because she fainted without warning. While I felt her body’s softness, it made me think. How old is she anyway? I haven’t asked her yet, but — No, I would rather think of a way to cure her fainting.

Chapter 22

A Step in the Right Direction

“Senpai, are you okay?” Louisa’s junior repeatedly shook the senior who passed out. She eventually came to, after a brief moment.

This senior who turned bright red as far as the ears from being told “I was worried about you, you know?”, showed me to a private room at the back. It was clearly different from the previous and the interior decors were totally different. There were a leather upholstered chair and a table of made of ebony-like material. It just makes me wonder where such trees could be taken.

After bringing a tea set filled with steaming herbal tea, Luisa sat on a seat across mine, then she began to speak after clearing her throat.

The “Named” orc, who recently appeared in the Plains of Dawn, was called “Yellow fang”. It got suppressed four months ago. The fanged orc’s body turns yellow when it gets excited. That surprised me much and not to mention, it seemed so popular during parties.”

“A demon attending a party?! Louisa-san, are you still unwell from being shaken? Enough that you’re saying peculiar things?”

“Huh? I’m sorry, I took charge of the guild drinking party this month and what I have thought of that orc was that it was very troublesome. The story was that its color and strength are different, but it is not much different in size from that of a normal fanged orc.”

It looks like that this is getting out of hand. Have I done something else that confused her recollections from the Juggernaut?

“Please compose yourself, Louisa-san. The named orc that appeared four months ago, is it the same as the Juggernaut?”

“T-that’s correct. Have I said anything strange? I’m very sorry if I did, but it was more

muscular than I anticipated.”

I am still confused. Is it some kind of abnormality? Maybe I need to explain a little bit more to calm her down? –But if I come in physical contact with her after I have explained everything, I’ll definitely place myself in an embarrassing situation.

“Oh, I see, you’re right. As its name suggests, Yellow Fang is a yellow colored orc. It is said that when seekers defeat around 200 orcs in the second level, they appear to seek vengeance. It is a more powerful demon compared to the level 3 Redface. Last time it was spotted, we incurred 7 casualties. Then, a party of 16 people in proper formation finally subdued it.”

“That large number of people...? That “Named” was also a brutal one, so I somehow understand... But even so, I am convinced that the Juggernaut we defeated is a different individual.”

“It is as you said. “Named” can be categorized in two –The common ones, and those which rarely appear. As for the Juggernaut, it is a rare type of a named “Fanged Orc”. In our records, the last time it appeared was about three years ago. 11 named orcs were subdued soon after, but all those that appeared were “Yellow Fangs”.

Though I can’t fully comment on the subjugation statistics, I can confirm they were not insignificant. Because out of those thirteen encounters, two were juggernauts, I can deduce that the appearance rate results to 1:10 over a span of 3 years.

“This is just my personal opinion, but Bergen... I don’t think that they’re the party who made the Juggernaut appear after killing 200 orcs. I’m certain their levels were low.”

“It was a separate party who made it appear. The named orc was way larger than a yellow fang, so we assembled 4 parties composed of 24 seekers. Sadly, they were annihilated. It is in the record that part of a surviving party that time was led by a seeker named Bergen. It was reported that he tried to desert the party he was in, so it was investigated in the guild. He gave us a testimony and said that they were just lucky to survive. Without sufficient evidence to indict him, the allegation against him was never proven.”

–It was beyond my imagination that he had such a deep root.

The Juggernaut couldn’t be defeated by 24 seekers. Bergen, together with two others,

deserted. They did not return to the second level of the Plains of Dawn, and the Juggernaut which had been their target remained there without being subdued.

Being informed of Elysha's arrival on the 8th-district, Bergen believed that he can use her to defeat the Juggernaut, so he took action. That's how we arrived at that scene.

"...So a "Named" can remain for a long period without being subjugated after they appear. And in some cases, there are a lot of sacrifices, even to the extent of collecting a large number of people just to defeat them."

"You are right. Three of the 21 people that has fallen to the Juggernaut has turned demi-human. They became "Orc Man" in the later. They are currently placed at the mercenary guild. The other 18 seekers, however..."

What happens to seekers when they fall to demons hands? I am curious, but the reality is so frightening. If not turning demi-human, you'll end up dead.

"If a seeker manages to take down a "Named", he is awarded the bounty. However, if the bounty is made public, some people will hunt them by using devious schemes like luring a party, thus making them the poor target of that "Named". Hence, we do not publicize the bounty on bulletin boards so as not to invite a perverse passion for mischief. In sharing you this, I should have taken into consideration your safety by informing you that the Juggernaut is yet to be subjugated... Also, it is difficult for the guild to maintain order considering the various conducts it oversees. Although it's difficult to be in charge of many things, it does not mean that we don't care about your safety. Furthermore, we don't know what kind of information is valuable when facing a "Named" of that level. We barely understand them."

"If you say so, then I would be at ease as long as I'm safe. Really... I'm grateful..."

Louisa wipes the tears she shed that showed her relief knowing that we were all safe. She was aware about the horrors the Juggernaut had brought to the guild and though still recovering and seemingly delicate, her behavior was genuine.

As Louisa took out her monocle, her shyness paints a faint red across her face, and she prepares to receive the logs from my license.

"Well then, allow me to check your activity logs in the labyrinth."

“Please go ahead, thank you.”

◆ Seeker's Accomplishment ◆

10 points awarded for reaching the Plains of Dawn – 2F.

20 points awarded to “Arihito” for reaching level 3.

10 points awarded when “Kyouka” reached level 2.

10 points awarded when “Suzuna” reached level 2.

75 points awarded for defeating 15 “Watadama”.

64 points awarded for defeating 8 “Dokuyaribachi”.

230 points awarded for defeating 23 “Fanged Orc”.

800 points awarded for subjugating “★Juggernaut”.

The Credibility of Theresa has increased. 50 points awarded.

The Credibility of Kyouka has increased. 50 points awarded.

The Credibility of Suzuna has increased. 10 points awarded.

The Credibility of Elysha has increased. 50 points awarded.

30 points awarded for rescuing another party.

100 points awarded for rescuing “Misaki”.

90 points awarded for the capture of 3 criminals.

50 points awarded for obtaining “Black treasure chest”.

Seeker's Contribution Points..... 1649

8th-District Rank: 2

(Ah, three people leveled up. Even though Elysha was in the party, is the experience value we got from the Juggernaut really that huge?)

However, the rising difficulty in the labyrinths poses a great challenge so it might be best to match our levels soon and attain efficiency. Moreover, the efficiency of hunting only improves when I use my skills on the party. –To be honest, it's quite annoying.

“Oh... A Three-digit contribution is great and all, but if it was me, I won't be able to go up 4 digits in just a couple days...”

With a blushing face, Louisa got all enthusiastic as she clasped her monocle close to her chest.

Apparently, credibility gets carried over as part of contribution points. The limit seems to be 50 in a single exploration. I have also found out that activating “Support Attack” once, gives a contribution of 10 points. Suzuna’s health was not reduced, so “Support Recovery” has not been recorded.

“1,649. They’re outstanding numbers. In the total contributions, you came second in rank. 1,660 is the record for the 1st place party. A massive outbreak of demons took place during that time, so they were able to hunt an insane number of watadama. For Atobe’s case, however, you have exceeded 1,000 because you have managed to subjugate the Juggernaut...”

“With this, you are now qualified to be promoted as a two-star seeker.”

“Congratulations! Will you purchase the remaining number of copper tickets today? The Juggernauts prize money is 100 gold coins, so you can get them exchanged.”

I have thought that it would be more tedious, but defeating the Juggernaut achieved our goal much faster than I had anticipated.

“Since there are 8 remaining tickets with me, for the other 92, please let me purchase them for 276 silver coins.”

“Understood. With this, you can now take in Theresa as your companion. She is a demi-human, so you can have her in your party for as long as you want. But if you so choose to dismiss her, you’ll have to return her to the mercenary guild.”

“It’s okay. She happens to have an irreplaceable role in our party... It might be near impossible, but ever since I met her, I have always wanted for her to revert as human.”

“It’s not going to be easy. But if it’s Atobe-sama, then maybe... Anyway, I have heard that it should be possible if you go back and forth in the 4th-district by entering and exiting the Great Sanctuary. If you accumulate enough achievements, your wish will be a reality within a few months.”

(The Great Sanctuary in the 4th-district... Now this is some intriguing development!)

Depending on the district, there may be some major facilities in the country. And as a country, a governing body will naturally exist – I would like to know more but would that be so much to inquire at this time?

“Louisa, excuse me, but I have another question. Is this country governed by a King?”

“No, the founding families have long been banished from the 1st-district. Now, it is the god of the Great Sanctuary who has the real power and it includes us, your mentors at the guild.”

“Hmm... So we are exploring because it is by the intention of the country? That means that you have no choice but to become a seeker, right?”

“Yes. As you may have noticed, the labyrinths in this country are all located in a distinctive spot somewhere in this world. The only entrance is the gathering point for reincarnated people near the country’s wall... But I am not in a position to know why it has been decided like that.”

In other words, there are various types of labyrinths, not just plains. The required skills and equipment will also change, and unless the seekers adapt themselves flexibly to the labyrinth’s environment, they could be stuck.

To do away with that, a party with lots of members is needed. Five or six people in a party should be the most effective to adopt that flexibility. If there are no restrictions on the number of people to support, then in some cases, having more than ten people could readily challenge a formidable enemy.

“Thank you for telling me lots of things. Louisa-san, lets change the topic. How about our rankings?”

“Each’s contribution points are calculated separately, but that depends on one’s role in the party. Atobe-sama is in the 8th-district... it’s amazing, 2nd place... A single digit. Igarashi-san is in 438th place, Suzuna-san is the 435th place, and Elysha-san is 115th place in the 5th-district of around 12,000 people. Congratulations, you can now change your accommodations to a “Royal Suite”. There are preparations needed though, so it won’t be ready until tomorrow.”

Royal suite – that is more spacious than a suite. If that’s the case, then Igarashi-san, Theresa and I, the three of us can live without any problems.

Igarashi-san also jumped up the ranking with these contribution points. In other words, the possibility of her staying at a stable is gone. It is no longer necessary for

her to stay at my house.

(You even told us that you were going to make a bento... I hope that you can find time to cook, even if we have to live separately... Yesterday night was just an exception, so I won't expect it to be the same every time.)

“...Atobe-sama, would you rather choose to remain in your present accommodations?”

“Oh, no, that's not it. I will go to see the new room tomorrow, so please allow me to change rooms if I find it suitable.”

“Certainly, I will then request an appointment to the landlord so that you can check the place in private. Also, with regards to unlocking this “Black Treasure Chest”, you would need to remove its existing trap. I will introduce you to a skillful “Box Maker.”

“Box Maker? Is there a specialty shop for removing the traps on treasure chests?”

“Yes. Because the job called “Trap Master” hardly fails in unlocking a box. Only in an unlikely event that it would be difficult to open a treasure chest. There are several valuables inside there, no doubt. So it's worth it to be safely opened, even if you pay a fee.”

I was able to purchase tickets. I was able to confirm the rankings and I also had a recommendation to a “Box Maker”.

I really have been indebted to a lot of people now, and I also want to convey my gratitude towards Louisa-san for being in charge of me, one way or another. I know that may be extremely difficult, but I hope she allows me to invite her to a celebration party.

“Thank you for everything. Thank so much. Louisa-san, until what time are you working today?”

“The guild is open till late, but I will not be on shift. I will be out soon.”

“Uhm... If it's okay, would you like to have dinner with us? I'm sorry to invite you so suddenly, but I would really appreciate it if you join me.”

“Well... I guess it's okay? If you don't mind, Atobe-sama, I would certainly love to

partake in this opportunity with you.”

—At this moment, I just really wanted to share with Louisa-san this feeling of accomplishment for a job well done.

Adults will drink alcohol to a certain extent, but Suzuna, Misaki, Elysha are still minors.
— Let’s just visit the tavern

How will Igarashi-san behave when she gets drunk and how will Louisa act when she gets sick? It never occurred to me what could happen if it turns out that way.

Chapter 23

Pleasant Talk

Louisa asked me to wait at the guild's plaza and so I found myself waiting once more – viewing the scenery around me.

With the excessive size of the Juggernaut, couriers used a transfer skill to deliver it to the dismantler's place. It's rather unfortunate that I couldn't deal it to Lye Carton since there was only a single place in the 8th-District that can accommodate the said enormous demon.

I thought that I would regret being unable to treat Melissa to some rare materials. However, I have learned that the 8th-district dismantlers will work on the Juggernaut altogether, which includes Melissa. The thick bones, with the size of a log, seems suitable as a high-grade building material. The claws will be materials for luxury glass, and as a whole, there exist many ways to use the other remaining parts as well.

(The dismantlers perform such a crucial role, huh. Without them, the seekers cannot hold true to their job. How I wish I could have one of them as my companion.)

As a rule of thumb, Elysha took top quality materials from the fanged orcs. It seems though that the value of these materials remain the same, even if they are left at the hands of a dismantler. Well, if you really couldn't bring everything, you'll opt to take only those of a better value.

Regarding the materials we've discarded like those watadama, some seekers found value in gathering them. In the labyrinth, you can get overloaded, so some are discarded. Also, defeated demons that are left unattended for long hours will have their ownership forfeited. Taking them will not affect karma, so other seekers can acquire them.

"Thank you for waiting, Atobe-sama."

"W... Welcome back. I see that you've got a change of clothes at the guild."

“Yes, if I walk outside in my uniform, I would end up conspicuous... I don’t have any comments about my attire, but as a receptionist, we easily receive greetings from men. There was also an official guild notice to dress modestly whenever we go outside.”

Although she said modest, her appearance greatly changed when she loosened her previously bounded up hair. Her adult-like clothes presented an air of confidence, even though her soft body lines lay exposed.

(For her vertical sweater, it will surely grab attention... It may be of an orthodox design in this world, but why is there a notch on the chest?)

“Hm? Is something the matter, Atobe-sama?”

I thought Karma would increase, but that was not the case. It was stated that “It depends on the relationship”, a relationship wherein one can have a good look without reserve. –Given that it can mean trouble, it is best to avert my gaze on those forbidden places.

“No, I was just surprised because your appearance changed quite a bit and as I have thought, the ON-OFFs of working women are amazing.”

“Fufu... the staff who are most likely serious at work are the ones who change a lot after working hours. I do not change much, but I definitely love alcohol. So I may end up being a talkative.”

“I think that’s fine. I like to drink and watch everyone in front of me get excited.”

“Atobe-sama, will you still act like a Rearguard, even at drinking parties?”

“No that’s not it. It has often been said from long ago that it’s nice to enjoy things while you are young...”

Louisa-san is enjoying herself. She is not acting that reserved either. How did we even form such a favorable relationship on the second day of our meeting?

Igarashi-san also reconciled with me, but I believe that there’s something amiss. — I’ll be living with her until today, and beyond my position as a companion, I won’t be expecting anything else in the foreseeable future.

(...Why am I remembering what happened last night? Am I regretting that I didn't make a move? No, it's only because of my support skills that I'm being liked.)

Pondering whilst walking, a guy came running from the opposite side and came into a collision course with Louisa-san.

"Watch out...! That's dangerous! I guess he was in a hurry."

I instinctively pulled Louisa-san's hand. There were no other options, and I didn't want her to get hurt.

"There is as much as three-thousand people here, so it will be crowded around the guild... Louisa-san?"

"N-No, uhm... I was just thinking that I might end up drinking too much tonight."

"Eh...? Well, moderation is better. If you drink too much, it will kick in the following morning."

Although our conversation gave me a hunch, Louisa-san seems to be in a good mood.

She lines up beside me, then we resumed to walk. Somehow, I get this feeling that we are being stared upon, but she openly smiled and merely brushed it off.



Tonight, the tavern is packed. "How I wish I could have secured a seat before it became this crowded", I said to myself when I entered the establishment, but Igarashi-san was there, waiting.

"Atobe-kun, our seat is over there. The wider table was vacant so I... Oh! You also invited the lady from the guild? Not bad!"

"I'm sorry for showing up so unexpectedly."

"Oh, please don't mind it, I've also been indebted to you. You've been in-charge of Atobe-kun since he came to decide on his job, am I right?"

"Yes, although now I feel like it's predestined. I have never expected to be in charge of

such a talented person like him.”

“This person has always been to my rescue... we were boss and subordinate previously, now, it has been reversed... now I’m the subordinate.”

“Well, is that so? Boss and subordinate...? He said he only spoke you at the company. You’re only an acquaintance...”

“Eh? Even so, but we started talking about a lot of things since we got reincarnated. I don’t feel that reserved about him either.”

(Why do I feel like some kind of strange power keeps leaking from them, even though they’re just talking and smiling at each other?)

“Atobe-kun, you’re the leader. Please take the seat at the center, okay?”

So she said. Come to think of it, it’s my golden opportunity to see Igarashi-san at a drinking party.

(Igarashi-san rarely hangs out, even when a drinking party starts early. I didn’t know she had a curfew at that time and everyone said that she was just that bad at socializing...)

Since the president had his eyes on Igarashi-san, it was expected that she won’t attend on drinking parties for the regular staff. — There were people who said that. At that time, I believed those rumors about her. I feel ashamed of myself.

“...Are you recollecting memories back when we were at the company? I can tell just by watching you make that sort of expression...”

“Oh, N-No. Do you like to drink alcohol, Igarashi-san?”

“There was a bit with my father’s relationship. If I don’t go home early, he will sulk for not serving him alcohol.”

A local celebrity, a strict father on her curfew. I guess he was a very doting father. – Now, I’m quite sure Igarashi-san’s family is grieving. There is nothing I can do for her family, but I can help her to keep moving as always so that she can enjoy herself, even for just a little and feel a sense of reassurance as the day passes by.

“Let’s forget about that and let’s go have a seat. Louisa-san, feel free to sit next to Atobe-kun.”

“I’d rather not, Igarashi-san. For now, it should be the leading roles of the party.”

“I-Is that so? Then... Will Suzuna-chan or Theresa-san be okay to sit next to him?”

“Eh~, please put me in as a prospect too. I am also grateful to Akihito-san, so I should serve him the drink. I’m good at serving liquor you know~?”

“You can’t. Atobe-kun said he was not very good dealing with gyaru-like kids.”

“Oho~, aren’t you just jealous towards a younger girl~?”

Both of them should settle this. Why is Louisa-san also feeling restless? — isn’t she already an adult?

“There is a saying that we often commit many mistakes when we are younger. Are you sure you are reflecting properly?”

“Y-Yes, I’m reflecting properly, okay?~ Akihito onii-chan, how old were you again?”

“O-onii-chan...? I may be a bit older, but I wonder if I can actually get used to it?”

This career woman and this gyaru got bad chemistry. Observing them actually made me nervous, but Misaki seems to have calmed down after hearing me talk. I’ll have to patch this up.

Theresa and Suzuna sat quietly alongside each other and it was somewhat a peaceful atmosphere. Although Theresa’s equipment remained as it is, Suzuna has changed her red and white clothes. She changed into the ‘town girl’ style of clothes as like Igarashi-san has called it. Her ponytail remains unchanged, and her nape which took the light of the bar was nothing short of dazzling.

“Onii-chan~, do you like old-fashioned girls? You keep on looking at Suzu-chan.”

“W-Where did that ever come from? Such topics are forbidden.”

“Eh~, so it’s no good? You prefer someone older?”

Misaki is trying to extract my preference by any means possible. I have to acknowledge that my preferences are not in any way biased. –But I have to be careful not to sell myself out and say that I personally like vertical sweaters.

◇ ◇ ◇

All you can drink and all you can eat if you have at least six people. The charge was one gold coin. It was very cheap.

Surrounding a rectangular table, Teresa, Suzuna, Misaki sat on the opposite side, Luisa, me and Igarashi-san on this side.

Everybody ate so marvelously, liquor was filled one after another. I half-emptied the miniature barrel-like tankard, poured on it, drank from it, then repeated. In the process, my consciousness slowly fell on a subtle daze.

“Eh? Onii-chan? You in a good mood to drink a lot~?”

Misaki stood from where she sat and took my mug for a refill. Suzuna also came along with her.

“Well, I have a good tolerance for liquor. Are you minors drinking your juice properly?”

“Suzu-chan used to make sake back at the shrine, am I right?”

“M-Misaki-chan... that was because it was a tradition since the times of old, and I didn’t drink the sake I made.”

Igarashi-san reacts to the few words spoken by Suzuna. Is it something like amazake that you were making back at the shrine? Is there a little alcohol content in that?

“Suzuna-san, why is your job at a shrine? Is your family house perhaps located at a shrine?”

“Yes, my father was a priest and I often helped at the shrine.”

Was that the reason why she chose the shrine maiden job? Well, a shrine maiden suits

her, and I also believe any high school girl of an average household has the likelihood to choose that job. In reality, during the shrines busiest season, a great number part-time shrine maidens are hired.

“Arihito-san, here... please take this”...

Is Suzuna a bit nervous? The sake uncontrollably flowed from the bottle and a small portion was spilled. Some were caught in my pants but it was nothing too serious.

“Oh, I’ll clean it myself. Don’t worry about this.”

“No, I have my handkerchief, so I can immediately... I am truly sorry.”

Suzuna wipes my pants while blushing. Handkerchiefs are valuables in this world, so I’m sorry to have you use it for such a thing.

“I’m sorry. I’ll pour it better this time.”

Suzuna pours the sake once more. This time it went well. At first, I thought that it would take some time getting along, but that was not the case.

Again, I emptied the tankard to about half. If it’s about one or two refills more, then it should be okay.

“...Atobe-kun, shall I pour you some more? Maybe you’re already full, but...”

“I’m all good. Shall I pass for the section chief?”

“Is Kyouka onee-san the section-chief? Oh, if it’s the case I would also want to know how you ordered onii-chan around as a subordinate.”

“O-ordered around...? It’s not like that... and I can’t say anything further.”

Igarashi-san felt despondent while she recalled her demon-boss era. I also hope that you can bear to mind not to say anything unnecessary to Misaki.

“Well, I don’t really care anymore. I’ve been indebted to Igarashi-san since I came here.”

“...You don’t have to be so humble. I’m the one indebted to you many times over.”

Igarashi-san takes a bottle of sake and pours some into my mug.

I’m still on the impression that it will still take some time until the both of us can really reciprocate each other, but there’s no need to hurry because even in this world, we still go out as a team.

Before trying to place the mug on my mouth, Louisa-san poured fruit wine on the glass of Igarashi-san.

“You’re only drinking juice, you know? How about having a clever toast for this occasion?”

“S-sure! I was planning to drink at any moment now so...”

“Louisa-san, your glass is also empty. There’s still a lot to drink, isn’t it?”

Theresa can also drink alcohol, and she drank undisturbed while chewing on some meat dishes.

Her entire skin shed a hint of being flushed and the face behind her mask looks tender as well. — She may not have that much tolerance for alcohol.

“Theresa can you still handle one last drink?”

“.....”

When I got up and asked, she nodded and handed me her glass. I’ve been in Theresa’s care from the first day of being here. As a gesture of gratitude, I poured her something to drink.

“Well, then shall we drink?... Everyone, cheers!”

“CHEERS!”

A toast with all the glasses and mugs. I also got to be the last one to drink from my mug.

It's not every day that I get to drink this much. There's ample time to spare for Theresa's official enlisting, so until then, let's just continue this pleasant talk over drinks.

Notes:

From now on "Reliability" will be changed to "Credibility" as recommended by a fellow TL.

It was fairly mentioned in some chapters especially on seeker's accomplishments. Please do take note of this change. My apologies for this error.

Chapter 24

Moonlight

Louisa-san, Igarashi-san, and Theresa are drinking. I have yet to confirm Theresa's but there are no age restrictions for consuming alcohol in this country.

Elysha took quite some time to dress up. She arrived a tad late. As a pair to her straight and flowing golden hair, she opted a blue accented one-piece dress that looks similar to what she wore under her armor. We made another toast to welcome her arrival. – At this point, I have already been drinking quite a considerable amount.

“Misaki, your face is all red. Have you possibly been drinking?”

“No, Suzu-chan didn't allow me to. Ely-chan, do you drink too?”

“E-Ely-chan...? That's my first to be called like that. If its Ely though...”

“Then, may I also call you Ely-san from now on?”

“...Yup. Will Suzuna be good enough, since it rings better for me?”

“Uhuh~. I thought so, you've become super chummy~. I know, right?~ Because you have matching personalities, and both of you are calm and composed.”

“T-That's not true... I'm chatty from time to time. I mean, I can also speak up you know!”

The three younger girls spoke heart-to-heart while Theresa sat beside them, drinking at a restful pace.

“Oh, so good! Right now that there's everyone, it tastes better than usual.”

“Onee~san, you handle your alcohol well! Here, here, here! Have another!”

“Misaki-chan, Louisa-san is already on her fourth cup, so I think it's best to let her be.”

“The mood has already changed from a while ago. Consuming more alcohol beyond this will be bad”

Misaki serves Louisa-san a drink. Suzuna seems to be worried about the bad luck that's accompanied Misaki recently and Elysha was somehow overwhelmed with Louisa-san's glamour while she was looking at her cup.

“Suzuna-chan's consideration pinches the heart. Once in a while, we adults just want to have a drink. At times, I also wished to have a drink at a bar with my friends, not just to stay at home and accompany my dad while he drinks when we have dinner. Atobe-kun, are you even listening?”

“Y-Yes I heard you but, I think it's already past your limit with alcohol, Igarashi-san”

“My, I'm still not drunk, you know. Atobe-kun, you've never seen me get drunk yet. Since yesterday, all I ever drank was water... Don't you want to join me for a drink?”

“No, no it's not that I don't want to. We've been drinking, but it's almost time you know?”

“Now, now, it's still early, isn't it? You still have time to spare before going to the mercenary guild with Theresa...”

While saying that, Louisa-san poured herself a drink. Suddenly, with faintly flushed cheeks, she boldly wraps her arm around my back then raises toast face-to-face.

“L-Louisa-san, that's so sudden. Is something the matter?”

“Sorry, it seems that I may have gotten a little drunk. It's kind of annoying, but I have the habit of clinging to my friends when this happens...”

“Hey~ stop that! Isn't that a little too stimulating for onii-chan?”

“Tch...”

I somehow anticipated that this might happen, but her sense of distance has become near excessive. Even Misaki felt so embarrassed, Suzuna too didn't know what kind of face to show.

(Don't tell me that she's the type that gets erotic when she gets drunk? T-This is bad, Igarashi-san is just behind me.)

"E-Excuse me. Please, let me step outside for a bit..."

"Hey, don't escape. Just sit down properly, okay? Atobe-kun, because you accomplished a great feat, have more pride in yourself. You can order us as much as you want, you know? Here, I'll pour you some more. You have to drink lots and eat lots! Say Ah~..."

Igarashi-san is becoming preachy, or should I say, she's becoming someone like a mother. She pierced the remaining ham with a fork, ate it then followed it up with a drink.

(If I have been drinking with the both of them yesterday, this might actually be the very same result... Is this a good outcome? Or a bad one?)

I'm not that of a heavy drinker, but there's one thing I can say about Igarashi-san when she gets drunk. She leaves a lot of openings.

(So I have been thinking about those kinds of things, huh, but even so... worldly desires are unnecessary for my party. I and Igarashi-san are companions... I must never take advantage of her, just because she's drunk.)

"Gulp, Gulp... Haah...! So good! Hey, Atobe-kun, it was because I thought that you were the person who was up to the task. Compared with the others, your documentation was flawless, even though I have not required anything with regards to the format. Wasn't that a good thing? There was nobody else for the task but you, my reliable subordinate..."

"I-I understand. Excuse me!? Can you please bring us some water and some pickled fruits?"

"Certainly sir, please wait for a moment."

I told the lady shopkeep at the back. While waiting, Igarashi-san continuously narrated about how much she has held me in high regard and how regretful she was for abusing me.

(I wish you could have told me about that when I was working overtime, but really...)

“Also, last Valentine’s Day, as an act of gratitude, I even made them a little different from what I had distributed to others. I know I made the packaging the same, but Atobe-kun didn’t even notice. Hey, are you listening!? Back then, did you properly eat the chocolates I gave you!?”

“I ate it and it was delicious, you know? So please, calm yourself down.”

“My, I don’t feel like believing any of your words because of the way you speak. After all, those chocolates, they were from your most hated boss, so you threw them away, am I wrong? I returned home carrying a precious return gift from White day. But having heard that it was just obligatory, when I opened the fridge, it was all but empty... my mum and brother, both of them ate it without asking my consent. Can such things be done so normally? Even if it’s obligatory, It was given to me and I brought it home!”

Seriously, I wish you could have just kept it in your room, but I am in no position to utter those things. I wonder. Could it be that Igarashi-san too, even by the way she is, got subordinates who admire her? Or am I just too stressed that time for failing to notice? No, I just believed that it was nothing to be concerned of.

“Arihito onii-chan, did something happen between you and Kyouka onee-chan~? If so, this is quite platonic.”

“Something like that would be unacceptable, wouldn’t you agree? Look, can you understand the situation here?”

“Atobe-kun, don’t go scolding someone in a manner like that. Here, have some meat. Eat your meat and everything will turn out well. I’m already getting irritated because you’re not eating any meat, you know?”

I don’t know if she’s in a drunken daze, but at the very least, she’s not picking a fight with anybody else. When Louisa-san came and leaned on me, I wasn’t, in any way, able to escape.

And to Elysha, who had been waiting for our exchange to finish, finally decided to insert herself into the conversation then asked curiously.

“...during Valentine’s, friends exchange gifts, don’t they?”

I see, now I understand where this conversation is going, however, she is from Scandinavia and it seems that their practice for Valentine’s is different from Japan, the only country with all certainty that causes a racket for a mere obligatory gift.



After leaving the bar, Louisa-san and Igarashi-san seems to have hit it off and both proposed that we move to my room to continue our chat. To sum it all up, they plan an overnight stay.

Is Elysha sobering up too, or was it because of the temperature inside of the tavern? She was looking up while flapping her cheeks.

“Well then, I’ll accompany Louisa and Kyouka home. Suzuna, Misaki, do you want to come with me?”

“Sure♪. Onii-san, how does a suite look like?”

“...it is the first time that I get to visit a room of a man, so if it’s with everyone then...”

(Anyway it would still be later before I go back to the suite. If I include Theresa, then there will be four people.)

But assuming that I will have to sleep on the couch, there’s no way that we can have a single person in a bed.

“Louisa-san, and Atobe-kun too. From now on, I hope that we will continue to have a good working relationship.”

“Same here. I am also looking forward to Kyouka-san’s active participation. I’ll be glad to support all of the members of the party.”

Igarashi-san and Louisa-san are like kindred spirits. Maybe they can comfortably sleep together.

After entrusting the key of my room to Elysha, we parted from them. I then took

Theresa with me and returned her to the mercenary guild. Upon arrival, I asked the staff who was outside to call for Leila-san.

“Oh, there you are. If you go beyond the working hours, you’ll be restricted to hire a mercenary. It’s good that you came back in time.”

“Leila-san, at last, I was able to gather the required number of copper tickets after our explorations for this day. Regarding Theresa, can I officially enlist her to my party?”

When I handed over the copper tickets, Leila-san visibly showed signs of her surprise. After accepting and rifling through the bunch of tickets, she double-checked to ascertain the quantity.

“I surely have received it... 100 tickets. I’ve heard that there was a large orc that was brought to the dismantling yard near the outer wall. Tell me Arihito, was that your doing?”

“Yes, though I couldn’t declare it in a louder voice. I also want to quietly get passed that, so please keep it confidential.”

Leila-san exhales a short sigh. Rather than being impressed, she reacts with admiration.

“You’re certainly something. Even for a rookie like you, I believed that it could take around one month in the shortest. Just unbelievable. I didn’t even expect that you could prepare the tickets the next day after we have discussed it.”

“I am surprised myself. So far, I’ve had a variety of fortunate and less fortunate engagements. I need to be more vigilant from now on as well. I need to revert Theresa as human, too.”

“I see... I honor those intentions. It has always been my duty to give refuge to demi-humans, but more importantly, it has always been my desire that they recover their heart. Regrettably, I can only do this much... but if it’s an honest and excellent seeker like you, my hopes are not lost.”

“Regarding Theresa, she is my first partner. There are these moments that even though she could not talk, I somehow know what she feels. Whether it’s my imagination or not, I can ascertain her emotion even though she doesn’t speak.”

Theresa remained quiet all throughout. But when I handed the copper tickets, she fixed her gaze at me.

She has emotions. But for now, it's just so limited.

"Arihito, ever since Theresa showed that she's taken a fancy of you, she maintained that feeling. I cannot completely say that Demi-humans have emotions or that they have a will of their own, but if that's what your intuition tells you, right now is a better than yesterday because you've earned yourself a place in Theresa's heart. That is what I believe."

"Thank you very much! I sure do hope so, too."

The events from the time we've spent together is more important than an indication for an increase in credibility. I should not take advantage of her and from now on, I'll be relying on her.

Leila-san and I finished sealed the deal with a handshake. After that, we headed back to the inn.

Theresa continued to patter while following me from behind. Is it the rogue's skill or an effect of her lizard equipment that I cannot hear her footsteps?

"Theresa, you don't need to walk behind me. You can walk beside me if you want to."

"....."

Theresa thought for a while, then she lined horizontally beside me — Though I thought that she has lined up, she then went forward a little.

"...Are you just going to walk in front of me like the usual? As in my 'Vanguard'?"

Whether or not I understood her intentions, so I asked. And as expected, she didn't answer.

—No, it was not the case.

She nodded repeatedly and moments after that, she shook her head. But what's that

supposed to mean? — Once again, she came back and lined up beside me.

“That’s it. You can walk anywhere as much as you want. But in battle, you can set out in front. And then, just like what you have done now, I can support you.”

Again, she nodded repeatedly. She looks at me and lightly tugs my sleeve.

“Shall we start heading home soon, is it?”

“.....”

She didn’t answer. Is there also a need to hurry? If you want to walk together, then having a stroll with a drunk who’s also sobering up may not be that bad.

We eventually took our time strolling around town until we reached the inn where everyone was waiting. The moon hung from the sky and the lights of the street lit aglow. They illuminated our path as we walked forward.

Chapter 25

Seeker's Habit

When I arrived in Normal Heights, the lady manager from the administrative office approached to greet me.

"Atobe-san, Atobe-san. Today seems very lively and just now, the ladies have been playing a lot. How wonderful it is to be young."

"I apologize for the racket. Three of my companions will return home soon."

"Oh, is that so? Trying to get intimate with the party after explorations are over...? Is that it?"

The lady manager's cheeks turn a little red. I wonder, is there a usual practice done by seekers when their explorations are over?

"I'm but a mere novice who was just reincarnated recently, so there are still a lot of things that I need to know. Do things like these happen often when explorations are over?"

"Oh dear, a novice you say...? Atobe-san, how old are you right now?"

"Uhm, I'm 29, but..."

When I got reincarnated, something in my body was refreshed. Or rather, I felt like something was reset. The occasional signs of aging that I have felt when I was a corporate slave seem to have been cured. It's not that I have really become younger, but right now, I feel like I'm a high school student.

"Uhm, Atobe-san, about that, I can see that you're already a working adult. But for a Japanese, you look way younger than your actual age. So that being the case, I'm rooting for you. Would you mind having something like a mixer with one of the daughters of my employees? That is if you want to."

Uh... Erm, Thank you. It's been very busy so far, but I'd really love to hold conversations with different people. Regrettably, starting tomorrow, we might be transferring from our current lodgings."

"Well, isn't that amazing? You were able to come to our lodgings on your first day. *"Atobe-san is a promising one."*, I'll be sure to tell that to everyone. For sure, beginners too would be encouraged."

"W-well about that, I'd really appreciate it if you wouldn't spread it with garnishing. Please consider that every novice is trying their very best."

"Yes, I know that too well. After all, I've been on these lodgings for the longest time."

I have heard her request but I wonder if she'll be able to somehow convey mine to her employees. It would be unusual for a novice to move to a royal suite in just two days after reincarnation, so it would be all natural if it becomes a hot topic for conversation.

Although I cannot avoid what people might say, I would do any means to gain reputation if the situation calls for it. — At any rate, I'll be leaving the 8th-district soon, so there would be no problems, even if we leave bits of rumors here.

Anyone can confirm their rank using the license, but there's no way for you to know the others if you don't go and ask them directly or if you don't pick up information like what the rumors say. In other words, there is no such thing as automatically knowing the name of the person should there be any change in the rankings.



As I proceeded to ascend the staircase going up to the third floor, Theresa stood motionless next to the landing base of the stairs.

"Is something the matter?"

"....."

Silent as ever. I looked at the direction where I came from, then back to where I am.

"Is there anything ahead that makes it difficult for you to move?"

Are there any other guests? –I wonder. For a moment, I thought that I heard something like the voice of a cat, but sooner, I came to realize that it was an outrageous voice.

“N-nooo... this is a business hotel. The walls are thin. Our voices can be easily heard... Seriously!?”

Now I realized what the lady manager has been indirectly trying to say.

There are parties composed of both sexes and there are members with mutual associations, affections and such. For a couple, it is also possible that after a day's work, they also get into the mood. –Well, things like that are already a given.

It's no longer strange for me, but this awkwardness is odd. Although Theresa couldn't say anything, it seems that I have to properly end this odd mood.

“I-It seems that they are in the middle of something. Are they making that noise while their door is open? If so, I need to bring it to their attention.”

“.....”

I proceeded and went to the second-floor corridor. From there, the door of the farthest room was opened a little.

(No, it's intruding on another person's privacy, so I shouldn't close it. Everyone, I'm sorry if you get to hear their voices.)

“.....”

“I-I'm sorry. I think that it has been at a wrong time that I brought you along. I was pretty sure that at this time, it should be all quiet.”

We left the place and proceeded to the upper floor. Upon reaching the third floor, I noticed that the walls were thicker. We wouldn't be able to hear much of those noises any longer.

According to my observations, even though her demi-human lizard mask became part of her body, she can still show subtle expressions like blushing. I'll never understood what an embarrassed lizard is, but because Theresa's equipment doesn't cover her entire body, it is visible when her skin turns red.

Compared to when we first met, she has been slowly opening herself up. From the time I continuously talked to her until we reached our room, it has never been awkward. Honestly, I hope that I could already find a peace of mind.

“Theresa, starting tomorrow, we’ll be moving to a different room. From now on, I’ll be bringing you along, so just think of it as part of the job.”

Theresa looks at me and as expected, her lips that peeked from her mask gave a flat expression. However, the face behind her mask was flushed not only from the lips, but also downwards her neck.

“.....”

“Don’t worry. I just enlisted you in the party and it’s not like I bought you. The tickets were just used for the deal.”

When I said that, she paused then nodded in agreement but her blushing didn’t subside one bit. –Well, maybe the effect of alcohol is that great.

“I hope that I am not intruding while you’re talking about important matters, but can I tell you something?”

“Whoa there, for a moment you got me all surprised. Elysha and Suzuna too. Where have you two been?”

“We were enjoying the night breeze from over there when we suddenly heard this cat-like voice out of nowhere.”

“I-Is that so? W-well, it seems that there are cats that can also meow in a louder voice.”

They seem to have come from the veranda. Instead of worrying about the voice they heard from the second floor, I’m just glad that they weren’t able to realize what that actually was.

Surely, I did not think that I was going to worry about the acoustics of a room after my reincarnation. But in the next lodgings that I am transferring to, I hope that they used better quality building materials. I would appreciate it if they can show fine engineering here in a different world.

“So Elysha, what is it that you would like to tell me?”

“The room rented out to one party has a restriction on the number of people who can stay. How high did you go up in the rankings in this district?”

“I’m up to 2nd place and I’m going to check a Royal Suite tomorrow so...”

“The maximum number that can stay and live on a royal suite is up to six people. The maximum people in a single party is limited to eight and the total number of people allowed to live together is also eight. There are two people in my room, me and Suzuna...”

“Elysha-san originally rented out a room in the 5th district, so the room she has here in the 8th-district is only but temporary. If I could raise my rank, I was also thinking about renting a better room.”

If it’s a twin room of Elysha and Suzuna, together with a royal suite of six persons, then I no longer find the need for additional rooms.

“If you choose a small room, the amenities would also be cut-rate, so you should consult with everybody about living together, if possible. If the resting place is uncomfortable, the recovery from fatigue will be affected.”

I recall that only a small amount of health and mana could be recovered from the stables, and I think that’s expected since we are talking about resting in comfort.

However, I have considered that with this ends our cohabitation. Whenever I think that it will continue, I become quite embarrassed when I get to face Igarashi-san up close.

“Well then... would you decide on taking the room? Once you move to the 7th district, you will be starting from a small lodging once more. You can rent the room for a week, so you can use the Royal Suite as a base. If you want to permanently live in one place you have to buy the property, which comes at a hefty price. You can start to own a home once you get promoted to three-stars.”

I am currently two-stars and I think that three-stars is not that far from reach. For the time being, I’ll ask for the conditions on how to achieve it.

“How can I get promoted to three-stars?”

“First, you need to be in the 7th-district. From there, you need to collect a total of 10,000 contribution points. You will also be presented with quests. If you clear them, you’ll be promoted to three-stars.”

“Thanks. I’ll keep that in mind. By the way, aren’t the both of you going home yet?”

When asked, Elysha and Suzuna looked at each other as their faces turned bitter.

“Misaki-chan borrowed your bed. Can we wait for a while until she gets up?”

Suddenly, the door opened and it was Louisa-san and Igarashi-san who came out.

“Atobe-sama, welcome home. Please pardon me for the intrusion.”

“We’ll go ahead and take a bath, so take care of the room, okay? Misaki-chan is sleeping on your bed. Just let her be until she wakes up.”

“I-I understand... That brat. Taking another person’s bed without permission...”

“Oh, Suzuna, we won’t be able to make it back in time for the bath if we head back first to our quarters.”

“Is there no other time when we can enter? W-what should we do? I’ve been perspiring, and we’ll be exploring again with Arihito-san tomorrow...”

–I sense that something big is coming. No, I might just be overthinking.

“Well then, can we just go altogether? Though there is a fee, we can always rent a change of clothes from the inn.”

“Y-Yes. It’s an emergency, so it can’t be helped. Suzuna are sure it’s okay?”

“Ely-san, you wanted to take a bath, right? Let’s go.”

“It’s decided then. Atobe-sama, later!”

Louisa-san ended the chat then left with everyone as they headed towards the first floor baths. Theresa and I enter the room, then sat on the couch.

“Aaah... so tired. Theresa, just take a seat on anywhere you feel comfortable with.”

“.....”

“Hmm? Or maybe... do you also want to take a bath?”

As she was wearing equipment, it never occurred to me that she may also need it. But if her equipment is unified with her, how will she even wash herself properly?

I felt like Theresa was supposed to say something, but she kept quiet. She inspects the inside of the room instead then returns at the back of my couch.

“.....”

“W-Well, you can sit anywhere you want to. I was just curious if you’d like a bath.”

As I turn towards the back, she tilted her head and looked straight at me. The lizard head which was intimidating at first seems to be all-charming right now.

“O-Oh, my level went up today. Shall we check on my new skills?”

“.....”

Understanding that skills are the lifeline for seekers, she sat on the couch and bothered not to stay behind me. It can be viewed separately, and I want her to be comfortable at least.

(Now then, will I be able to acquire new skills?)

◆Skills Acquired◆

Support Defense 1: Reduce the damage taken by a frontline member by 10 points.

Support Attack 1: Increase the attack power of frontline members by 10 points.

Aid Recovery 1: Recover the health of frontline members by 5 points per 30 seconds

◆Available Skills◆

Enhanced Support 1: Increase the morale of frontline members by 10 points.

Behind the Frontlines: The field of vision extends to the rear for a certain period of time. Consumes 5 points of Mana.

Falcon's Eye: Improve the ability to perceive a situation when you are positioned at the rear.

Backstand: Fix your position behind a target.

Backdraft: Automatically initiate a counter-attack when you get attacked from the rear.

Available Skill Points: 3

(Oh! Now there are four skills that can be acquired... I should have checked properly that time when I became level 2.)

Apparently, the skill points obtained whenever the level goes up seems to be one or two each time. I should not waste precious points over the useless ones, however, looking at the description of the skills gives me a feeling of tension building up.

Among them, one skill that raises my concerns being a rearguard is the one that would likely compensate for the risk of a direct attack to some extent. "Backdraft". When a flame that has been burning in a closed space suddenly gets a supply of oxygen from opening a door, an explosion occurs.

If I can only fight back against attacks from the back, then I can still be vulnerable from attacks from the flank. It may be a problem if the rearguard constantly faces the opposite direction. It's not a perfect defense. It's a powerful skill, but can I can see that it has its own shortcomings.

The other skills also contained interesting descriptions. The skills that are considered "Support" does not consume any mana, shall I take them? The problem is, I do not know if there would be some sort of penalty given that it is "Support".

Theresa looked at me while I was thinking about which skill to take. I would also like to check on her skills and hear from everybody as well. –I'm expecting a meeting either tonight or tomorrow.

Chapter 26

Equipment Limitations

Everybody had all the time to return from taking a bath, but until Misaki wakes up, I won't be able to leave the room. It's practically safe in our current lodgings, but I'd still be worried if she's left alone.

"Theresa, do you have a license? Every seeker should own one, so-"

Theresa shook her head. Mercenaries don't own a license — Losing her life meant she also lost it.

"....."

"Hmm?... Do you want me to check your back?"

She nodded then turns to show her back. She was seated on the couch. Her lizard mask covered her head down to the upper portion of the neck and under there, black hair has grown. Theresa has lengthy hair.

She collected her hair, then swipes them forward. Part of her back that has always been concealed now reveal themselves to me.

She wore lizard, leather-like armor and on her nape were markings, which looked similar to a seal where characters were noticeably inscribed.

"Is that a "slave crest", Theresa?"

She turned and grabbed my hand and guided it to touch the marking on her nape.

Suddenly, it began to glow from red to blue then the shape of its characters transformed.

"...Ngh....."

Theresa moaned in a muted voice. And as soon the characters finally settled, I let go of my hand.

(Did she perhaps overwrite the ownership of the slave crest? Was it even possible for her to do that?)

Anyway, Theresa's armor perfectly fits the shape of her body. Though her age was not yet known to me, she might be younger than what I was expecting.

"....."

She silently turned her head to look back at me. When I was touching her crest, her lips were closed shut but now they were ever slightly opened.

Not just her lips, but also her skin was as smooth as china. Didn't she bear any injuries before she lost her life? Presently, I could not find those scars.

After gazing at me for a while, she notices my license then points at it.

"Oh, my license? Do you want to check it out?"

I handed out to her my license when she confirmed. She slid her forefinger and accessed the party members menu.

She selected her name and thereafter switched to a display containing her list of skills.

◆ Skills Acquired by Subordinate – THERESA ◆

Lizard Skin 1: Demi-human Passive. Improve Defense and Attribute Attack Resistance.

Accel Dash: Grants the ability to move rapidly within an instant.

Enemy Detection Expansion 1: Extends the field of enemy detection on a slightly wider range.

Vigilance 1: Grants the ability to perceive surprise attacks from behind.

Silent Walk: Produces no sound when walking. Producing a sound is optional.

◆ Skills Available ◆

Pickpocketing 1: Chance to steal personal items without being noticed.

Escaping: Allows escape, even in a restrained state.

Finger Arts 1: Gain the ability to remove low-level locks and traps.

Remaining skill points: 1

So it's safe to assume that the total skill points at level 3 are 6 in total. For Theresa, 5 is currently allocated.

Rogue jobs don't really specialize in a certain field of expertise, but they are more of a thief based job. I wonder if they can have skills that allow them to master removing traps as well. At any rate, it looks like Finger Arts can be usable since her battle capabilities are not a bit lacking.

For "Escaping", it can counter binding attacks. I just hope that we won't often encounter monsters with tentacles.

"Pickpocketing" can be used on monsters. It's a different story though if you use it on people. Karma will likely increase. I think that "Finger Arts" should be okay. — no, there's no need to rush on things.

"Then let's go with enhancing your strong points if we can. Let's pick up some good skills once you level up. If in case that's its really necessary, then let us pick one among these three."

"Ah, Onii-san, welcome back. Do you know where everybody went?"

I accidentally closed the license when Misaki woke up. She casually approached me while removing the scrunchie that bounds her hair.

"Everyone went for a bath. How about you, Misaki? Will you be able to make it before they return?"

"Oh, it should be alright. Suzu-chan enjoys taking long baths. Onii-san, can you loan me some cash for a change of clothes?"

"You don't have to return it. I know that you've been in a lot of trouble."

"Eh, aren't you making it sound like it's a parting gift? I'm already a member of onii-san's party, right?"

"Didn't you say that you would want to do things on your own?"

“Uuu... W-Well... I came to experience how comfortable it is to sleep on a suite’s bed. Onii-san, until I could find my own goals, please let me stay with you!”

So, is that’s it...? Well, you told me that you would like to join me once in an exploration after all.

“Misaki, why did you choose to be a “Gambler”?”

“I thought that it would be fun if such a job existed. I always had excellent luck with items like fortune slips. My card game is also strong, you know? Onii-san, do you gamble?”

“I used to... with lottery tickets, that is. Did you hit for the jackpot?”

“Ehehe, someone in my family hit 100K yen. That’s about it, I guess?”

So as it turns out, becoming a gambler meant she had the qualities. She might even strip me bare if I carelessly challenge her to a game based on luck.

Of all things, it is her luck that I find amusing. Say for example, when defeating a Named, it is possible that our drop rate may improve. — Unfortunately, she was not in the party when we defeated the Juggernaut, so she was not particularly involved with the black treasure box.

“I took “Increased Drop Rate” and “Child of Luck” for my skills. Onii-san~, someday, I’m pretty sure that I may be able to help you.”

“I understand, I really do. We’ve reincarnated together, so from now on, I am counting on you too.”

“Yay! I’ll tell Suzu-chan and everyone that I’ve made a companion!”

I’ve always thought of her to be this bratty child, but she acts rather innocent.

“.....”

“Theresa, will it also be fine if we go now?”

She didn't nod, but when I proceeded towards the bath, she followed me from behind. Well, I guess that she didn't also need to nod every time just to reply, it just means that if she goes with everyone, then it's already understood that she would also want to take a bath. –I'm just concerned of her armor because it won't come off.



I'm the one holding the key, so I need to be the one to get out of the bath first. I went down the first floor at a quick pace and headed straight into the baths.

I took hurriedly off my clothes at the changing room. There are no restrictions on when to bathe, so it's expected that guests will enter whenever they feel like bathing. It's self-service though, so it's likely that even if you have off-boiled water, it may end up lukewarm by the time you end your bath.

I wonder, how would the royal suite's amenities compare to this? Are there also limitations to reheating water here in the 8th-district? — Can't it be managed somehow by some type of magical skill or craft? If that would be possible, then it should be easy enough for the manager to produce hot water for the baths.

I entered the bathroom and scooped out hot water from a tub using a bucket. It's no different from Japanese baths, that's why I find it easy to enter. It's somewhat inconvenient though since there are no faucets. The amount of hot water that a person can take is fixed at a certain amount and the tub is filled regularly after several people has consumed the water. It's best not to overuse it.

(Luckily for us though, we can always visit it every day. Igarashi-san most especially... If she continued to live in the stables, then it would surely be harsh for her.)

Suzuna herself was concerned about sweating so much which only shows that morale is affected without the basic necessities for living. To accommodate such, there should be a lot of lodgings that should be prepared for the seekers.

Since it has always been my practice to start washing from the head, I poured hot water and then started to whisk my hair with the shampoo-like thing that Igarashi-san has been so excited about. It was fruit scented and it bubbles easily. However, compared to what I have been using, this shampoo-like thing somehow had this squeaky feeling.

–At that moment, I felt something touch my shoulders. My body trembled.

“Uhm... W-Who’s is it?”

I didn’t notice anyone coming in but I’m certain that there’s a person behind me. I felt someone tap my shoulders once more so I tried looking back, even if foam has been building up on my eyes.

The first thing I saw were reptile scales. It’s was lizard’s leather armor and I was so familiar with what Theresa has been wearing.

The visible foot was covered with lizard leather. Looking up a little, there was this tight hip and a bare-naked navel. Finally, without looking up further, I understood the situation.

(T-Theresa... Why are you here...!?)

“.....”

“T-Theresa, if there’s one thing that I should say to you, this is the bath for men. Should you be entering here?”

As much as possible, I should remain calm while scolding her. She puts her hands on her chest and made it look that she was somehow reflecting.

“N-No, the armor won’t come off so it’s okay if you wear them. I mean, the women’s bath is where everyone else is, so you have to go there...”

While it was a desperate attempt, Theresa just looks at me. I prayed that she would understand what I have said, but unfortunately, she didn’t move, not even in the slightest.

She placed her hand towards the base of her throat, reaching for something similar to a metal-piece. In an instant, after pressing something, I heard a clicking sound.

And because she is a Lizardfolk, the leather armor that should have been impossible for others to remove, has now been “Stripped” from her body.

What unfolded in front of me was a sight way beyond understanding. Except for her

mask, her body armor has been taken off.

The equipment on her shoulders, wrists, and ankles did not disengage though, as well as some lizard scales on some other places. It's probably the "Lizard Skin" that was listed on her skills column. Now that her equipment is gone, in front of me is a flawless white skin that peered through the gaps of what was once covered with armor.

"...T-Theresa... Is it okay for you to remove them? No... What am I saying?"

"....."

She stared in bewilderment while I panicked.



I ran towards the changing room, and for the time being, placed a “Reserved” plate so that others won’t be able to come in. — I can only make time for 15 minutes and I hope that they wouldn’t even notice.

I took a towel and when I came back to the bathroom. I pressed Theresa to wrap herself up. There is nothing more I can do with what has already been burned to my eyes. – She was elegant beyond imagination and I felt a heart-racing sensation. The sight of her leather armor coming off her body is still being played repeatedly inside my head.

(She’s been wearing them for a long time and the rest of her equipment is still there... No, now that think I about it... I told Theresa to relax beforehand, but now, I’m the one being conscious...)

“.....”

I came to regret it later the moment Theresa tapped my shoulder. She doesn’t seem to be embarrassed to show herself naked and I couldn’t figure out what encouraged her to do so. Or rather, she’s got a great nerve in ignoring the trivial things.

All of a sudden, you become bold when I considered that you were being shy. And although I was told that demi-humans have no emotions, is there also such an aspect that makes them unpredictable as well?

Credibility rises, there is also that thing –anyway she came to the baths because she wanted to. This is within her good intentions.

“Did you come to wash my back? Is that the reason?”

She quickly nodded in agreement. I consider not to force her to, but I already gave her the opportunity to unfasten her armor. If only I could have instructed her not to, then she shouldn’t have taken it off.

“...W-well... there should be no problems with that, but are you sure?”

“.....”

When she nodded, she went behind me and started washing my hair. By the way, I was covered with bubbles –If she continues doing this, I won’t be able to rinse myself.

After she lightly washed my back, I instructed her to wash too. I soaked in the bathtub with my back turned away from her, so that I couldn't see her.

(...I feel like a master ignoring her after all that she has done... N-No... to rinse Theresa's back would be too much for me.)

Contemplating on what to do with the mask, it seems that it will never come off after all. Not only that, it just doesn't come off even if I wanted to.

Before long, Theresa also finished washing her body. I turned around my head and gave a quick glance. Although there was no towel wrapped around, her body was not clearly visible to me.

"It's a bit hot. Are you sure you want to go in for a dip?"

"....."

She nodded while coming over, and I was obliged to close my eyes once more. It's inevitable to remove a towel once you take a bath.

Hearing the gushing of water, Theresa soaks in. Finally, I calmed down a little but I should avoid turning a glance towards her. — I have to say it after all.

"Theresa, I'm glad that you washed my back, but next time, you should be entering the women's bath."

"....."

"N-No, I would be in trouble unless you agree to it. I am a man too, so you should be more wary."

Still, she didn't nod. It's good that she is not being forced by the "slave crest", but I feel a strong determination coming from her that she will be entering next time.

"Theresa, I know that you're doing all of these with pure intentions. However, I just can't reserve the men's bath every time..."

After a while, I stepped out of the bath. No matter how you look at it, everyone might

eventually grow suspicious of me. Theresa's determination will be the hardest to break through.

"Theresa?"

"....."

Her lizard mask turned red. I knew it. Even though it was not that long that she's been soaked in hot water, she was already flushed.

"Hey... lizards are... cold-blooded creatures, right?"

"....."

"Whoa... Hang in there... I'll cool you down immediately!"

For a lizardfolk, some of their equipment cannot be taken off. And by nature, they may not be lizards through-and-through. That is all I can say.

If she gets dizzy quite easily, a normal temperature bath should be well-suited for her. Rather than thinking about what to do hereafter, I have to quickly think of a way on how to relieve her because her whole body is flushed and probably, her consciousness is slowly slipping away.

Chapter 27

The Rearguard's Evening

Before Theresa even passed out, I managed to take her out of the bathtub.

Like a princess, I carried her to a clinic where a charming young lady greeted me. For the first time, I carried a young woman in the person of Theresa. To my surprise, she was delicate and not heavy enough.

She's light, but as long as she levels up, her physical condition might improve. I know far too well that if health improves, so too will physical wellness.

(We still maintained our body after being reincarnated. It seems that it also has a relation to the skills that we have.)

I'm gradually adapting to it and it seems that my support skills are only using up my magical power. Perhaps I'll come to know how it feels when my magic power becomes exhausted.

As for Theresa, it seems that she is weak to extreme heat. Her health bar decreased to a noticeable value. For the days ahead, it's going to be lukewarm or even cold water for her bath. I'm doing this for her own good. What happened earlier raises concerns for her life.



Despite the fact that it was the correct decision to have Theresa wear that flame resistant buckler, I went up to the third floor while thinking of a good explanation of the current situation.

I can only configure the tactical order from the license when I enter the labyrinth and I fully understand that it is a necessary measure. After all, you can't walk in town assuming the party formation. It would look surreal. Aside from that, it would definitely draw attention though I am yet to see something like that.

(...Also, Theresa's clothes are...)

I'm grateful for the employees of the inn for helping me out when I requested immediate help for Theresa's change of clothes. She wore a one-piece sleeping garment. It was a nightgown but she doesn't have any underwear on.

It seems to me that demi-humans only wear the equipment necessary for their race. Except for her weapon and the shield, it seems that she has already adapted to wearing lizard leather armor. I was much opposed when I saw her in a nightgown as well.

I mean she doesn't have underwear, so by all means, I don't want other male seekers in our lodgings to see her like that. Definitely, I won't allow it.

I should have asked Leila-san in detail how demi-humans live their daily lives. What they liked and what they disliked, etc...

"....."

I invoked "Aid Recovery" that restored Theresa's health in a short while after leaving the bath. Although she recovered at once since she didn't take a lot of damage, deep inside, I couldn't help but worry.

"Theresa, forgive me for failing to notice. It's because I didn't know that you were bad at dealing with the heat."

She didn't nod. Does that mean that she entered the bath without knowing that it was actually heated? Wasn't she aware that she had this weakness towards the heat?

"Next time, is it alright if you just bathe in normal water?"

"....."

"Well, we can have an option for a bathtub that's not being used by the other customers but..."

She shakes her head. Does that mean that she wants to soak with me, even at the cost of getting dizzy? Where does her steel resolve even come from? How do I put it? Is she just being brave, or just being stubborn?

For her to enter the bath, she needs to obtain skills like heat resistance. Maybe Lizard Skin level 2 will make her more resistant to heat. For now, it is the most ideal to get an accessory which gives heat resistance since it would still be used once she returns human.

(This world is unique, you need to think about countermeasures, even when taking a bath...)

With no way for me to know what she's thinking, Theresa took the stairs and went ahead of me. I have no other choice but to hit myself and apologize for looking upwards. This is so embarrassing. Let's discuss with Louisa on how to make her put on some underwear.



We made it back to the room first, followed by everyone. In one way or the other, I was able to sincerely explain to everyone how Theresa entered the men's bath.

"Well... That is serious. Since demi-humans enlisted in a party are very much welcome, little did I know that there could be circumstances like that." *(Louisa)*

"T-The way you tell it to me somewhat hurts my conscience."

"If it gets discovered that you brought a woman to the men's bath, the other residents could issue a complaint subject for eviction, you know? That is plenty enough for a reason." *(Kyouka)*

Louisa-san and Igarashi-san who sobered up both appeared wearing similar nightgowns. It was easy to see who has the true merit in terms of proportion.

"....."

"Uhm... Theresa-san, you're not going to get angry at Atobe-kun~?" *(Kyouka)*

Theresa nods. With that alone, my sins have been alleviated to a certain extent. The concern that there were two people mixed in a bath was reduced to mere talk.

"Theresa-san just wanted to convey her gratitude to Arihito-san, isn't it?" *(Suzuna)*

“Even so, I think that it was a bit too daring... We were completely unaware, so that wouldn’t be a nice thing, you know?” *(Elysha)*

Elysha doubted me at first, but when Suzuna followed to patch things up, the suspicion somehow died down.

“Onii-san, I suppose that it was just nothing aside from a lovely time bathing~. However~, how unexpectedly active were you when the both of you were spending your time alone?” *(Misaki)*

“I would have appreciated it a little if you would have already ended it in the first half of your statement. You’re talking too much!”

“Ahaha. Actually, we were talking about it in the bath but, Onii-san can’t bear it right now. Kyouka onee-san...” *(Misaki)*

“Hmm...? You shouldn’t have said anything unnecessary. Honestly, kids these days...” *(Kyouka)*

Maybe Igarashi-san just didn’t pay due attention about the talks with the bath, if she did, I can say that it’s information that would result in some sleepless nights. Eventually, there are only two beds. How do you do it with one guy and six ladies?

“Uhm, I’m going to bed, so will it be okay if we decide our places?”

“It troubles me if you say it and look at me like that, so... I’ll sleep on the sofa. Since yesterday, I have been thinking that it was a poor decision on my part to expel you out of the bedroom.” *(Kyouka)*

“What...? Igarashi-san, I don’t want to be over-particular and go on nitpicking about the things that are inappropriate but, Atobe-sama is the party leader. He is the Leader. He needs to rest properly on a bed.” *(Louisa)*

“Ah, don’t mind it, really. I can manage myself on the sofa. Will it be possible for three people to sleep on a bed? My guess is that you’ll barely fit.”

It seems that three ladies can sleep together, but someone might fall if they are not accustomed to using a bed.

“I already used onii-san’s bed, so I’ll be okay on the floor.” *(Misaki)*

“Suzuna and I, both of us are intruding, so it’s okay for us to use the sofa to take our rest.” *(Elysha)*

“No, I’m used to sleeping on a chair, that’s why you don’t need to be hard on yourselves, okay?”

“...Okay then. We’ll be talking with Louisa-san so I’ll be resting with Atobe-kun in the bedroom. I guess it’s back to when it started then.” *(Kyouka)*

“Yes, I was planning to do that as well. Atobe-sama, please have a good rest.” *(Louisa)*

This session is rough to handle. I really appreciate everyone giving me the precedence but, I’m not very particular about sleeping on the bed. When I compare to sleeping on chairs lined up against each other back then when I was at the office, there are times when the comfort of a sofa is way better.

“Well, how about if we just decide it fairly by lottery~? Here, I’ve borrowed the feather pen that was sitting there and prepared Amidakuji!” ¹ *(Misaki)*

“That was fast... And, do you believe that you are likely to win?” *(Elysha)*

“Hehe, it’s fine, isn’t it? With this, there should be no hard feelings. I’ll hand it over to Suzu-chan if I get the jackpot.” *(Misaki)*

“Misaki-chan, don’t worry about me. We need to give priority to Arihito-san.” *(Suzuna)*

Suzuna’s honesty goes beyond all honesty. For Misaki, all she can only do is show an embarrassed grin because Suzuna took it seriously, rather than paying attention to her needs.

“Even if you decide amongst yourselves, I’ll still be sleeping on the sofa. It will be troublesome if you sleep in the room with me...”

“Oh... about that. I don’t mind it anymore. That was only the first day. I was just nervous...” *(Kyouka)*

“Eh~! I made great efforts to prepare this, so please, let’s use it. Now then, on with the

draws!" (*Misaki*)

Misaki makes everyone's write their name on the Amidakuji that she prepared. Only one place was left and though I felt that I cannot win against the gambler Misaki, I decided to write my name, just in case.



–And guess what? I magnificently lost so I was back on the sofa where I initially decided to sleep. It was the same as yesterday.

"Theresa, will you be comfortable there?"

"....."

In the bedroom, it seems that it has been quite a while that everyone was talking about lots of things, but I was too tired to mind it to until it became quiet. Theresa came out of the bedroom while concealing the sound of her footsteps then sat on the other sofa.

I lay down and she follows suit. The eyes on her lizard mask gradually turned heavy, but as soon as I thought the eyes were shut, they suddenly opened.

"Theresa, you don't need to do a night watch. As much as possible, please rest."

"....."

Theresa shakes her head once again. It seems that she couldn't get win over the sandman. After a while, she closes her eyes once more and resumes to sleep.

Also, before I went to bed, I had been thinking about the skills that I should acquire based on the list that I have seen previously. I will acquire skills drawing from relevant conclusions. It was good that we defeated the Juggernaut, so all I have to do is to be careful on what to acquire rather than be sorry in the long run.

"Behind the Frontlines" would be convenient, but I think that wouldn't be necessary if there is "Backdraft". If I can react automatically to surprise attacks from the back, then I'll be able to prevent myself from collapsing or falling from battle.

(But if I can increase Theresa's "Vigilance 1" then... Hmm. I couldn't just depend on the

power of Backdraft. Sadly, I won't come to understand it if I can't try it out.)

Skill points are precious after all, so I have to give due priority to which is more efficient with my role. Taking this into mind, the priority of the skills to acquire should be naturally decided.

◆Skills Acquired◆

Support Defense 1: Reduce the damage taken by a frontline member by 10 points.

Support Attack 1: Increase the attack power of frontline members by 10 points.

Aid Recovery 1: Recover the health of frontline members by 5 points per 30 seconds

★**Enhanced Support 1:** Increase the morale of frontline members by 10 points.

★**Falcon's Eye:** Improve the ability to perceive a situation when you are positioned at the rear.

Remaining skill points: 1

The skills with a ★ are those that were newly acquired. Although the skills allowing me to grasp the situation were important as they may look like, I don't have the slightest clue of what would actually happen.

(...Huh? I can see clearly over a distance... Moreover, I can clearly assess what's present in my field of vision. This skill... for a Rearguard... may not be that bad...)

As I closed my eyes in this dim room, my consciousness rapidly sank. If we move to the royal suite, then the problem with the beds will be settled. This might eventually be the last time that I will have sleep on a sofa.

By the way, I forgot to ask Igarashi-san her opinion about moving to another lodging. Anyway, we still have tomorrow. Nothing yet is too late.

–What's this? A whispering voice approached me.

◇ ◇ ◇

“...Why is everyone...? I also woke up...” *(Louisa)*

“I am wondering on what I should do. If it is like this, I won't be able to sleep

anymore..." (Suzuna)

"I knew it... Even if I am at a different room, I remain anxious the moment I lay in bed..." (Kyouka)

"Is everybody experiencing the same feeling? What the heck is this...?" (Elysha)

"Hey, why don't you act more responsibly? Onii-san is sleeping." (Misaki)

"W-Well, you know... that is... it's because..." (Elysha)

"...Good night. Sleep well... What a cute sleeping face..." (Louisa)

Everyone seems to have gotten up, but I'm very sleepy. It should be okay if the bedrooms are separate. Are they having difficulties sleeping because of the drinking party? That should be the case.

(...Please give me a little more time to sleep... If possible, until morning comes...)

The room becomes quiet. Whether this is a dream or reality, I am really not certain. I just want to sleep right now.



I hear the birds chirping. I got up from the sofa and then stretched my arms.

Theresa slept in a rolled position and used her arm as her pillow. Her blanket slightly fell, so I fixed it and looked around the room.

It felt like I was in bed while I slept. Also, it felt like everyone got up and talked to me while I was sleeping...

"...Am I just frustrated, perhaps?"

"...Oh, Atobe-kun"

"Ah, Igarashi-san. Good morning. Sorry for muttering something strange."

Igarashi-san who came out of the room seems to have overheard me talking to myself.

I shouldn't be giving vague excuse just because of a strange dream.

"L-Last night, you were sound asleep, weren't you?"

"Ah. Yes. I fell asleep and was sleeping like a log."

"O-Oh, I-I see. Everyone got up already. We are going to change our clothes, so please do not enter the bedroom."

"I understand. When Theresa gets up, I'll tell her to change her clothes over there as well."

"...Were you really able to get some sleep? Not once did you ever get up? You were sound asleep, right?"

"Maybe I got up, but I really don't remember it well. My memory is vague..."

"P-Probably because you were drinking, that's why your memory is vague, am I right?"

She seems to be all flustered. Well, I'm pretty sure that I got a little blanked-out and my body felt wobbly. There was still some alcohol remaining in my system.

"Then I'll wash my face so you better get up."

"E-Eh? Be careful then."

Since the washroom is common for every floor, we have to go out of the hallway. It was somehow very pleasant to see Igarashi-san being very friendly. I think that it would be a good chance for her to get accustomed in this world while she molds her character.

Notes

1. **Ghost Leg** (Chinese: 畫鬼腳), known in Japan as **Amidakuji** (阿弥陀籤, "Amida lottery", so named because the paper was folded into a fan shape resembling Amida's halo) or in Korea as **Sadaritagi** (사다리타기, literally "ladder climbing"), is a method of lottery designed to create random pairings between two sets of any

number of things, as long as the number of elements in each set is the same. This is often used to distribute things among people, where the number of things distributed is the same as the number of people. For instance, chores or prizes could be assigned fairly and randomly this way.

2.

It consists of vertical lines with horizontal lines connecting two adjacent vertical lines scattered randomly along their length; the horizontal lines are called “legs”. The number of vertical lines equals the number of people playing, and at the bottom of each line there is an item – a thing that will be paired with a player. The general rule for playing this game is: choose a line on the top, and follow this line downwards. When a horizontal line is encountered, follow it to get to another vertical line and continue downwards. Repeat this procedure until reaching the end of the vertical line. Then the player is given the thing written at the bottom of the line.

If the elements written above the Ghost Leg are treated as a sequence, and after the Ghost Leg is used, the same elements are written at the bottom, then the starting sequence has been transformed to another permutation. Hence, Ghost Leg can be treated as a kind of permuting operator.

Chapter 28

New Lodgings

Shortly after everyone has gotten up, we took a light breakfast in the room. It was morning service well appreciated.

Eggs, bread, and bacon. Fresh vegetables are not available this time around. Fruits, nuts and berries were the primary ones served during breakfast.

After finishing the meal, I accompanied Louisa to the guild. Morning in town was relatively quiet. There was staff who were already at work and seekers started flocking towards the guild.

“Thank you for letting me spend the night. For the first time in a while, I was able to relieve myself from stress and I was able to unwind.”

“I am the one who should be saying that. It was abrupt, but thank you for accepting my invitation. I hope you join us again some time once we finish a difficult task.”

“Yes. Certainly. Atobe-sama, are you going to the labyrinth again today?”

“This morning, I am planning to do some shopping and have that black treasure box opened. I’ll check the new lodgings as well.”

“Okay then. Unless if it’s mealtime, the manager there is available most of the time.”

First, we’ll drop by the Box Maker’s Shop and then proceed to check the lodgings. Come afternoon, we’ll proceed to the innermost levels of the Plains of Dawn. That would likely be all for today’s schedule.

Louisa entered the guild through an exclusive entrance made for the staff. It is at the back of the building. Embarrassing as it may seem, I waved my hand to bid her goodbye.

“...Though at first, I thought she was the type that was difficult to deal with. On the

contrary, she was amenable and we really got along well.” *(Kyouka)*

“We’ll have the chance to hang-out with her again. It seems that we’ll be able to keep her as our officer-in-charge, even if we have to move to a different district.” *(Elysha)*

“Heehh, you requested it from her, Atobe-kun?” *(Kyouka)*

“W-well yes, but there’s no ulterior motive, okay?”

She’s beautiful and above all, she gets inspired by the work that I do. Although she’s a lady worth keeping, pushing a step further will be difficult because of the existing relationship between the guild officers and their seekers.

“...T- that’s right. Atobe-kun is an honest person, so he doesn’t have any ulterior motives... Moreover, we are...” *(Kyouka)*

“Ky-Kyouka, haven’t I told you to keep that story a secret?” *(Elysha)*

“Oho~, were you talking about last night? Ain’t that good? Suzu-chan learned a lot of things.” *(Misaki)*

“Forgive me Arihito-san, I cannot look straight into your face right now... It is because that I,... with everyone...” *(Suzuna)*

“What happened back there?”

Suzuna said so anxiously, however, I won’t hold back in asking some questions. Everyone began to panic.

“No-Nothing, it’s nothing. Really. Atobe-kun was lying with his belly exposed, so It was natural for her to raise your blanket. Right, Ely~?” *(Kyouka)*

“Ye-Yes. That’s what really happened. We didn’t do anything else. Are you implying that we did something?” *(Elysha)*

Igarashi-san abandoned calling her Elysha and now calls her by a nickname. Looking back at the way they were before, I have never thought that they are going to get along so well.

These two appear to share a few attitudes, and it appears that they can work without being in conflict with each other. Having a good relationship is a nice thing to have for a party, especially if they work to achieve the same goal.

“Uhm... Is it something you can't explain or something you can't talk about?”

“Okay, okay, enough with that. Onii-san, leave that aside for now, ain't ya gonna check the new lodgings? Louisa-san told me about it. I have the location of that place. What's your take? Think about this thoroughly first.” (*Misaki*)

A cheeky one. To think that she would have to show me the location she got from somebody else. When she turned on the display on the license, the map of the town was shown together with a marked location. The new lodgings were located in a neighborhood away from Nornil Heights.



It was in the heart of the 8th-district. A 15-minute walk from the guild. In terms of convenience, there is nothing to question. Compared to Nornil Heights, a middle-sized accommodation, the range of facilities, the size of the room, hospitality, everything was perfect.

“Master, Milady, Welcome. Please, the rooms are this way.”

It was a western style building with four rooms. Other buildings identical to it were all located in the 8th-district Royal Suites.

Several maids greeted us at the reception hall. They wanted to take care of our belongings, but we're still checking it out. I requested them to show us the room instead.

Overwhelmed with the glamour, the over-energetic Misaki was at a loss for words. All the rooms lay with carpet, they were equipped with a large bath and washroom.

“...A-Amazing! This was more than one could have imagined. What can you say about this, Igarashi-san?”

“...While I was told that I could reside in the middle-class lodgings,... If there is a vacant room, here is better. Or am I a bother to you, Atobe-kun.?” (*Kyouka*)

“N-No! There is no such thing like that. Look, this is too large for a single person and I think that this property can house a large number of people. I am hoping that we get to live together if possible.”

“T-Then..... F-From now on, I’ll be living with you.” *(Kyouka)*

“Living”, I can’t help but imagine myself in the future. Will I be able to come back to a room at the end of the day? Shall I live a life constantly moving from one accommodation to another?

“O-o-of course! It would still be best if I could buy a house where we could settle for good.”

“...A-About that... Atobe-kun, what are you trying to come up with?” *(Kyouka)*

“If you can own a house, the number of occupants shouldn’t be relevant. More than one party can live together, you know? If you want Arihito to continuously make his way up the rankings, then it is best to go with your companions during monster “Raids”.” *(Elysha)*

I was thinking that rather than moving each time, it would be better to have a base of operations in one place, no hassle of moving in or out, a place where you would truly appreciate the aesthetics. –Prior to what Elysha said, not only for 16 or 24 people, but I have also learned that multiple parties can also live in a single house.

We are already six in the group, but if there would be more members to come, a full party can be assembled. It would also be possible to go on explorations while swapping party members if necessary.

(With that in mind, I can have more jobs that I can organize. Currently, I don’t have jobs in the vanguard specializing in defense. I don’t have a pharmacist, a wizard nor a monk.)

“If we don’t have the job with the necessary skills, then there is also a possibility that we can be stalled along the way. But if possible, no more additions to companions. Even if you don’t live in under a single roof, it may also be ideal to buy a house and live where you feel comfortable.” *(Elysha)*

“If the time comes that Onii-san will become an owner of several houses and decides

to give one to me, I... I'm gonna submit to his bidding." (*Misaki*)

"Doing such things in exchange for a house? Misaki-chan, don't you know that what you're doing is up to no good?" (*Suzuna*)

"...Both of you know that I have my own problems... When the time comes that you get near to my level, you can enlist a different swordsman. But please, even if it's only halfway, please, lend me your power. You don't need to accompany me to the depths of the labyrinth where my best friend is because I've been there before. I alone will suffice." (*Elysha*)

It's still a long way ahead, but I think that Elysha couldn't leave them without being true and honest.

"...Elysha, it was a bit strange when you were smeared with the enemy's blood. Is it a dangerous situation because you even tell your companions to keep their distance?"

I've thought many times over whether or not I should ask her about it in a different forum though I might be hearing something about it sooner than expected. Elysha began to narrate while looking down at the sheathed sword hung on her lower waist.

"This sword is called the "Scarlet Emperor". It was a weapon from a box that a "Named" monster dropped... I changed my equipment to this but it granted me the "Unique Weapons Job". Originally, I was a swordsman... However, equipping the sword made it impossible to part with." (*Elysha*)

"Unique Weapons Job"? Such a job exists?"

"Cursed Blade", a unique weapons job. "Scarlet Emperor", the cursed sword that couldn't be relinquished. In short, she couldn't change her job.

Similar to the circumstances of a demi-human, when they lose their lives, they could revive with a different appearance and lose everything of what makes them human. Equipment, as well as some other things, cannot be taken off.

"Before equipping the "Scarlet Emperor, were you aware of the consequences?"

"..."White Night Brigade", the group of seekers where I formerly was, hunted "Named" monsters. They collected boxes in order to strengthen themselves with whatever

weapon or arms present inside those boxes. Similarly, there are numerous seekers trying to improve their battle capabilities in the same manner, the grand-like approach per se. In the White Night Brigade, you are absolutely not allowed to refuse, regardless of the weapon.” *(Elysha)*

Elysha didn’t have a choice but to equip the Scarlet Emperor, even if she was clueless about what the weapon was.

Also, “Berserk” presents a lot of problems and it doesn’t even matter how strong her weapon is. If we can find some countermeasures with that, she’ll probably be the perfect vanguard.

“Weren’t there any specialty shops or skill holders who can appraise within the White Night Brigade?”

“When you bring the items to a shop, they’ll give priority to lifting the seal and the curse which in turn renders the weapon useless. Even though I was aware of the perils of cursed weapons, I have thought of them to hold much greater power than normal weapons so..... Never did I thought of having them appraised. Appraisal skills sometimes fail when you need it the most and there only a few people with that aptitude. Appraisers are also under the protection of the guild. Even in brigades, you seldom find a member who possesses that skill.” *(Elysha)*

–Those who possess rare skills are being guarded and protected by the guild. The “Box Maker” might also be one of those people.

The guild protects and opens specialty shops for them which also allows the 8th-district seekers to benefit from their skills. These capable individuals cannot be monopolized by top-ranking seekers and parties, thanks to the guild.

“...Perhaps that may be one of the means they choose to for the sake of getting stronger. Personally, however, I can’t sympathize with the brigade’s way of doing things.”

“...It couldn’t be helped. No use crying over spilled milk. I also wanted to become stronger, but ever since I became a cursed blade, there was nothing but regret... Just by wielding this sword, it didn’t feel like I’ve been fighting with my own will.” *(Elysha)*

“Elysha-san... but when you were fighting along with Arihito-san, it was different, am I right? You were fighting to protect us.” *(Suzuna)*

“.....” *(Elysha)*

After Suzuna said those words, Elysha’s eyes became tear-choked prompting her to cast her eyes downward.

“I would have met my demise if not for Arihito. But not until we were able to find Misaki and the enemy swelled in numbers. My level is higher but apart from that, I am still very much inexperienced.” *(Elysha)*

“Don’t be harsh on yourself. Even I was scared to death but Elysha held strong and skillfully managed the situation. Let’s do better next time. It’s better to have a stronger party from the start rather than fixing it along the way.”

“Arihito...” *(Elysha)*

It pains me to see those florid eyes. And as much as possible, it is the tears of a young girl that I wouldn’t like to see.

“So as far as experience values are concerned, I would still ask you to stay at the Guest position for a while longer. I’ll let you in the party if you need my support. I’m begging you, to tell me if you ever need it.”

“...Yes, I understand. I’ll be counting on you. Never approach me so recklessly and keep a clear distance until the battle is over.” *(Elysha)*

“Ah! But my skills can reach you even if there’s quite a distance.”

“Oh, I see...” *(Elysha)*

We defeated an “Immune to Physical” with a non-attribute supportive attack. How far was it that time? –I’m pretty sure that was a distance that is completely away from the battle perimeters of Elysha and the Juggernaut.

Maybe I can support her as long as it’s in my visible range. If granted, the flexibility of our tactical order will change greatly. So before the enemies we encounter becomes strong enough, I should work on verifying the range and effect of my skills.

“For me, Elysha’s “Berserk” is a dangerous skill, however, we can curb its risks. We

definitely need the curse to be lifted, and there should be stronger weapons that aren't cursed."

"...You... make it sound so easy, but... Aren't you frightened of me?" (*Elysha*)

"Why should I? Anyway, receiving a slash from your sword could be shocking, you know? Hence, I should maintain my distance."

"...Ahaha... I'm sorry for giving you a bit of trauma. As expected of Onii-san, you've just been reincarnated, but despite of that, you're surprisingly calm. I feel at ease when I actually see you like that... Hey, Suzu-chan..." (*Misaki*)

"Y-Yes. When I am with Arihito-san, it feels like time flows so gently." (*Suzuna*)

If everyone's saying that I've adapted faster than anyone else, then maybe this world is suitable for me. From now on, just to give everyone their peace of mind, I'll try my best to remain calm.

In this world, a momentary delay in judgment can prove to be fatal. An instant to grasp the situation is what I need as a rearguard to be able to choose from fighting or falling back, minimizing the risk.

"Well, if Elysha chooses to act independently after she attains her objectives, then it can't be helped. However if possible, I want her to become a long-standing companion since she's an excellent swordsman."

"Really... up to when will you be this kind-hearted? Kyouka, say something too." (*Elysha*)

"I am more than happy to have you as a companion. I don't have any complaints. The moment I entered his party, I've decided to follow his decisions. Also, I told Louisa that I'm his subordinate." (*Kyouka*)

"Eh...? Is there such a thing? Igarashi-san? My subordinate..."

"H-hey... but I'm very happy with that. Were you imagining something else?" (*Kyouka*)

Me giving various commands to Igarashi-san, the loyal subordinate. Ah, it seems to me that I'll be able to work comfortably. –Now I know the reason why people get drunk in

power.

“Everyone here is Arihito’s ally. It’s rather troubling if no one even tries to oppose him.”
(*Elysha*)

“I agree with that. Perhaps it should be Elysha giving him some stern warnings.”
(*Kyouka*)

“Fair enough. However, don’t you ever get mad at me because you gave me such role. It would be best if you’re the one reprimanding him though.” (Elysha)

“Now that you mention it, everything has been going well that I have nothing to trouble myself with. I guess I’m fine with doing it after all.” (*Kyouka*)

Hearing Igarashi-san’s words, everyone laughs –Myself included.

Theresa who’s been there all throughout our conversation nods to me. It was a show of her own will affirming to something.

There’s a total of six persons who will be living in this room. Surely, it would be bustling and it would be great getting along.

“Okay then... the inspection is finished. What shall we do next?”

“Well, we need to go back once to the lodgings and tell them we’re moving. They can just send our luggage over.” (*Elysha*)

“Can they also bring it here? It’s only been the third day so I don’t have that much.”

“Let’s think about the room assignments later. Until then, the luggage will stay in the living room.” (*Elysha*)

“It’s settled then. When everyone’s finished arranging the transfer, let’s meet-up at the plaza in front of the guild. Atobe-kun, let’s get moving too.” (*Kyouka*)

When we finish today’s exploration, everyone will spend the night together once more. Finally, I’ll be able to sleep on a bed. –After all, there are 4 beds and 2 bedrooms in the Royal Suite.

Chapter 29

Hereditary Skills and Box Opening

After the inspection, the contract to the room was signed. Elysha and the others returned to their lodgings once more.

I too went back to Nornil Heights together with Igarashi-san. Feeling indebted for the past couple of days for their wonderful hospitality, it's somewhat regrettable to leave. It can't be helped though since I'll be moving from one place to another until I can purchase a property to settle in. I have to get used to moving often.

"Atobe-san, please do your best out there. I'll be rooting for you."

"Thank you very much for everything. Please always be in good health, Landlady-san."

"Do remember the name of this grandma. Palm Arthur. For a promising seeker as yourself, may the hidden god always smile upon you."

Is Palm her name? She knew mine but I haven't heard hers. – That was rather rude of me.

"Well then Atobe-sama, where do you plan to go next? Please let me know, at least. I'll be very happy to have you here again, but since a promising seeker needs to be on the road, time will always be of the essence." (Palm)

"Uhm... Palm-san, hearing you say that, were you also a seeker back then?"

Igarashi-san asked me on why I was bothering myself on inquiring. Well obviously, they were talks involving seeker exploration.

"Yes, when I was young, I was a seeker with the job of a "Thief". Although people say that I am a thief, it was only by name. My specialty was removing traps and lock-picking. It was over 30 years ago. I have retired and my level has already gone down." (Palm)

“Oh, Is that so...?”

“Though I may look like this right now, I was called “Cat’s Hand” when I was young. I ranked up to the 6th-district where I eventually met my husband. That person is no longer with me, but I am not lonely because I have my daughter and grandkids with me.” (Palm)

When I retire from being a seeker, how will I spend my days? I haven’t been thinking that far ahead, but for now, and as long as I can, I’ll continue in the active duty.

Will I be able to leave behind a meritorious service? Or will I be in a position where I have to support other seekers as well? Either way, anyone can have a place where they belong in the Labyrinth Country. It is stated that “*All the reincarnated must become seekers.*”, but it looks to me that as long as you play a certain role after reincarnation, you’ll be able to live freely.

“After this, we’re planning to go to the store and have the box opened...”

“My, oh dear. There are three box maker shops in town and it so happens that one amongst those shops is owned by my daughter.” (Palm)

“Is that so? It’s a small world indeed, isn’t it?”

“It is the best box maker shop and I can personally guarantee you with, given her skills. They were contacted by my daughter, the “Lock-Picking” and “Remove Trap” skills which made it relatively easy for her to improve. I may have retired two years ago, but I was able to maintain my skills. I can still open a box exceedingly well.” (Palm)

“Skills were contacted... Does it mean that they were inherited by your daughter? That’s nothing short of amazing.”

When the child takes from the skills of the parent, is it possible for them to have a talent exceeding theirs?

“It is said that nothing but only the skills of the parents are transmitted. And my daughter pretty much resembles me.” (Palm)

“If it’s true, then the skills from different jobs can be inherited making them all around..... There’s no way that it should happen, right?”

“Children’s parents do not give birth just for the sake of them becoming seekers. I wonder if God even considered what he wanted to give.” (Palm)

Grandma Palm’s statements were relevant and it made me wonder.

In this country, you can get whatever you desire, you get position and prestige just by moving up the ranking order. However, pushing forward by without being fair is different from what I usually observe.

“But if Atobe-sama decides to go on that direction, then... No, it’s rather a sensitive topic. I’m sorry, as I grow of age it seems that I tend to lose a bit of hesitation.” (Palm)

“I- I’m not yet in that kind of relationship with Atobe-kun!” (Kyouka)

“.....”

Igarashi-san who was beside me became flustered while Theresa just looked at me. If there’s no mental telepathy, it would really be hard to read this silent maiden’s heart.

“L-Let me see... Uhm... Palm-san, I’m glad that you’ve told us about a lot of things. If the box maker that we’ll be heading to is your daughter, we’ll send her your greetings.”

“Yes, thank you, I would really appreciate that. Take care, both of you. Don’t push yourselves too hard.” (Palm)

With the grandma Palm seeing us off, we left the lodgings. Igarashi-san didn’t speak for a while, not until we reached the bottom of the hill and on our way towards town.

“A-Atobe-kun. Just to inform you, my level has reached level 2 and the number of skill points that I have increased by two. What skills do you prefer I take?” (Kyouka)

“Congratulations! Would you mind showing me your license then?”

“Well, I don’t mind. Aren’t you able to view our skills in the party?” (Kyouka)

“Theresa seems to be a special case because I can view it. However, in the case of a fellow party member, I won’t know unless they show me their license.”

Establishing trust and no more than that is needed to view another's license. Igarashi-san took her license from the pouch belted to her waist then shows it to me.

◆ Skills Acquired ◆

Thunderbolt: Run a bolt of lightning towards an enemy. Low probability of inflicting the shocked status.

Blinkstep: Enter a "Mirage" state and evade enemy attacks for a short span of time.

◆ Skills Available ◆

Double Attack: Increase the number of weapon attacks.

Brave Mist: remove the "Fear" status from an ally.

Freezing Thorn: Freeze the enemy's feet to delay their movement.

Snow Country Skin: Gain immunity from the "Freeze" status. Increases "Charm".

Bulletproof 1: Indirect enemy attacks are less likely to hit.

Decoy Doll: Consume a "Doll" to create a decoy replicated from yourself.

Remaining skill points: 2

"So Valkyries can acquire a lot of skills..." "Snow Country Skin" is listed here, is there any relationship between your Valkyrie job and a snow country?"

"...Maybe because my mother was from the colder part of the country?" (Kyouka)

"Oh, that may be so. You also have Thunderbolt... maybe because you frequently dropped them on me?"

"I took ' Thunderbolt ' first, but I guess it was because of my personality..." (Kyouka)

"Is that really the reason...? Thunderbolt is a good skill to have. If a monster gets electrocuted, then they would be easier to hit."

Igarashi-san looked at me with disappointed eyes. I should have been more careful about talking about the past. I even told myself to forget them, but despite that, I remained persistent.

At first glance, the stronger skill would be "Double Attack". It will have a good compatibility with Support Attack.

If we encounter a monster that can inflict the fear status, I want her to take “Brave Mist”, just in case someone couldn’t fight properly.

“...Uhm, Well... Atobe-kun, what’s your opinion if we say “women of the snow country”? (Kyouka)

“Enough to say that they’re like beauties from Akita? I can imagine that they have a light complexion.”

“Uhm... My mother is also from Akita, but that’s good enough. I’ll change the question then. Do you think that it’s better to take this skill as a countermeasure before a monster that can inflict the freezing status even comes out? ” (Kyouka)

“Let’s see, we can gain resistance via equipment, so it’s safe to skip on that one... Oh, but I’m a bit curious because it will increase your Charm.”

Igarashi-san is a beauty. What would happen if she takes “Snow Country Skin”? She’ll become more beautiful. Well, she’s not a demi-human so she’ll never go light like a yuki-onna.

“Th-that was way out of my intentions, but... for now, it’s better to choose another skill. This Decoy Doll, maybe it can divert the attention of monsters.” (Kyouka)

“I agree. It will be an auxiliary skill. It appears to be a powerful skill but it will depend on how you will actually use it.”

“Can I take it? The other one will be yours to decide.” (Kyouka)

In truth, she really wanted to take “Snow Country Skin”. She merely chose to remain patient because the skill isn’t urgent.

I have a good feeling that our levels will rise again for today’s exploration, so let me choose “Double Attack” for now together with the “Decoy Doll” that she wanted.

“However, it would be best if you produce some dolls before entering the labyrinth.”

“Now that you mentioned it, I saw it in the general store in front of the labyrinth.” (Kyouka)

“Okay, let’s buy it from there. The other skill is “Double attack”.

It is possible to say that all of her skills can be useful, but it really depends on the situation. If I hesitate to take action, then her active role will also be reduced. With “Double Attack”, it will be noticeably effective starting from today’s battles.

(How much mana does that skill actually use? If it costs about the same as my Blaze Shot, then we can use it in every battle.)

“...And with that, it’s settled. Ah, there are still so many skills that I wish to try out, but there aren’t enough skill points.” (Kyouka)

“Same goes for me. I would also like to take as many as possible. There are skills to try out and assess, but I couldn’t save enough.”

“Yes. The exciting feeling of taking these skills each time could become a habit...” (Kyouka)

“For Theresa as well, if her level goes up, then we’ll take a new skill.”

She had been looking all the time at Igarashi-san when she was deciding on her skills, so Theresa is definitely interested with hers. Right now, I am holding 1 skill point, but I am considering taking a new skill, much sooner than expected.

I’ll also ask for Suzuna’s skills later. I would also love to see Elysha’s skills. However, if she finds it difficult to disclose the skills of a Cursed Blade, then I won’t rush myself and wait for the right opportunity.



When I entered the box maker’s shop that was referred to us by Louisa-san, beside the table was a woman wearing an apron reading a book to a boy and a girl.

“Welcome, did you come with a referral from the guild?”

“Yes. I have been referred to you by Louisa-san. My name is Arihito Atobe.”

“Okaa-san, will you open it using that trick?”

“Yay! Show us the trick! The trick that Plum loves so much!”

The older child somehow appears to be the older brother, about 5 years old. The younger sister is about 3 years old. They look similar to each other. And they seem to be emotionally attached to their mother, the shopkeeper of this box maker shop.

The old landlady said she had a daughter and grandchildren, so this mother and children should be them.

“I’m sorry, they came over to play. But I won’t allow them to enter the cellar where the box will be opened.”

“Eh~. It’s only a simple box.”

“Sorry, Eik. This customer’s box will be very difficult to open.”

“But mommy can open it, right?”

“Okaa-san is a “Trap Master!”

Trap Master. That is the job of this lady box maker. Can she disable it despite a difficult trap looming in the box?

“Eik, Plum, go outside for a bit. Give grandma this letter. I’m sure she’ll be happy.”

“Mommy won’t come?”

“I will go after my work is done, okay? Eik, Plum too, I’m counting on you.”

“Okay! We’ll be waiting at grandmas!”

As the both of them prepare to go out, a big white dog from the corner followed them from behind. –As though it was their bodyguard.

Igarashi-san became interested with the dog, so with gleaming eyes, she started talking to the shop owner.

“...Wan-chan, you say?”

“...W-What are you trying to involve yourself with? You just can’t call somebody like that, you know.”

“Fufu. I also call her like that. That child is a breed of “Silver Hound” and she was originally an escort dog accompanying a seeker.”

“So nowadays, she’s just escorting the children.” (Kyouka)

Just like a faithful dog. I also like animals, so it’s refreshing to see a dog after a long while.

“.....”

Theresa appeared to be scared of the dog. Standing still the entire time, her hands placed on top of my shoulders. Hmm, I guess it’s natural that everyone has their own weaknesses.

“I apologize for not introducing myself earlier. I am Falma Arthur. Regarding Atobe-sama’s “Black Box”, I humbly accept the job of opening it as the guild-approved trap master.”

Her appearance was like a married housewife in an apron. But in reality, was the trap master.

With a smile that is filled with nothing but warmth and an embroidery of a dog on the apron’s chest –There was a magnificent rise pulling it towards its limit.

“...Atobe-kun, will karma rise in a place like this?” (Kyouka)

“Ye-Yes... No, I wasn’t looking at it.”

Igarashi-san pinched me in the arm to divert my attention. Unaware of our exchange, Falma-san puts a hand on her cheek. She blushed and smiled as if she was observing an intimate couple.



PDF by: traitorAIZEN